

A Buddhist monk in a red robe stands in a grassy field, looking up at a large, leafy tree. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear sky. The entire image is framed by a thick yellow border.

The Power of Zen Meditation

*Ten Spiritual Dialogues
with Dharma Master Hsin Tao*

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Hsin Tao*

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DHARMA MASTER HSIN
TAO



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When Stillness Speaks - Guiding students in a Meditation retreat at Munich, Germany.

1st Dialogue

Is Peace the Essence of Zen?

You are in the Essence of Zen – Here and Now

Q: Will Shifu please guide us on the experience of Zen meditation? Most of us don't have the experience of doing Zazen (Zen retreat for 7 Days).

A: Zen is simply your Ordinary Mind. Keeping nothing in your mind, you can then be as productive and creative as you could be!

Zen is life itself. If you want to make your life blossom and open up, you need to do Zazen. Zen is actually the full blossoming of your own beautiful life. Zen gives you a wonderful perspective on the panorama of Life. Zen's essence itself is primordially perfect and complete. You can't find any faults or imperfections in it.

And your life is of course very rare, wonderful and utterly precious. You should seize and savor this precious human life to seek for the Ultimate Wisdom of Zen. When you attain Zen, you can control your life and death. Unlike the fleeting and eroded sand and soil, you can NOW master your mind and your life.

Q: If you could guide all of us into this state of Zen, that would be wonderful! You could help many people on their path of seeking the Truth.

A: I am promoting Zen in overseas countries nowadays. Many westerners are very interested in Zen meditation. I introduced them a special type of Zen practice that I called "Peace Zen" – which has a very clear and systematic four steps in its practice. The preliminaries and the results of this Peace Zen are

very clear and productive, and they can practice it with unwavering faith and one-pointed diligence. This systematic approach enables them to understand, practice and realize the essence of Zen in a simpler and more humanistic way.

Ultimately speaking, Chinese Zen (Chan) has no gradual steps. Either you get it or not – that's all. There's no way or method to practice Zen. Since Zen has no specific steps and gradual methods, it can use ALL kinds of methods and approaches. Its exclusiveness lies within its flexibility and inclusiveness. Zen is forever lively, flowing and dynamic. But to understand the essence of Zen, you must have a very sharp and receptive mind. If you are slow and dumb, then you will need more time and efforts in getting to realize the essence of Zen.

So from my own practical experience, I've now designed Peace Zen in a very systematic and approachable way. If you enter into the practice of Zen in this way, whether you are sharp or not, you can be assured that you would realize its essence very easily and systematically.

Q: I just began to know about Zen, but I am interested in doing it more and more. I have some basic knowledge now.

A: Actually, the essence of Zen is within everyone's mind. It's in you as well, just that you didn't know how to recognize it. It will be such a waste if you miss this treasure of Mind within your own self!

Q: But Shifu, why we need to meditate?

You see, our mind is really very wonderful and amazing. You must utilize the energy and function of your meditation to look at your own mind. By doing meditation, you're introduced to your own mind. You are given a chance to understand your mind so that you could get along with it. By and by, by knowing your own mind's characters and nature, you can then use this very mind to practice the Dharma and to gain Enlightenment.

The Great Buddha has the same mind as ours as well. He had nothing besides his own Enlightened and Pure mind. When the Buddha attained supreme Enlightenment, all phenomena were transformed into the world of Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment). But what is this Avatamsaka World?

The world of Avatamsaka is nothing but our wonderful, glorious and splendid mind. So in order to attain Enlightenment, we must begin with knowing and understanding our own mind.

Zen is mind and mind is Zen. From the practice of Zen, you will find your True Mind and from this True Mind, you'll obtain Ultimate Wisdom.

The Zen way is the way to reduce or eliminate the burdens and hang-ups of your mind – NOT to add or increase anything whatsoever.

A man said to a Zen Master, "I want Happiness." Zen Master said, first remove "I", that's ego, then remove "want", that's desire - See now you are left with **only Happiness**.

From the story above, you know that it is a fallacy to be getting something out of your Zen meditation. No, you won't get anything in the beginning. The very purpose of Zen is to know the Nature of your own mind – which is egoless, desire-less, devoid of 'I' and all other relative labels and boundaries. By knowing the egoless-ness of this mind, or by eliminating our discursive thoughts and negative emotions, our True Mind will shine brightly

and sharply; chasing away all our darkness, ignorance and problems of life.

Zen is a direct way in penetrating into the core of our mind. Zen meditation can help you understand the nature of your essence – just like peeling the onion, layer by layer, you will find NOTHING at the end, and nothing is left in your hands. That nothingness or emptiness is the source of all. From here everything begins or has the possibility to manifest itself - beautifully and intricately.

The purpose of Zen is to be peaceful with your own self. Zen helps you to eliminate all outer complications, and it will help you to bring your mind HOME. When you go back to the Home of your True Nature of Mind, you let go of all stress, worries, fear and negative emotions. You become very relax; you are AT HOME - finally and ultimately. You become very at ease. You are comfortable, joyful and cozy. True relaxation happens when you return to the Home of your True Mind, your ultimate refuge and your true ‘comfort zone’.

When you practice Zen meditation, you are actually

enjoying a wonderful journey going back to your hometown, your motherland or your sweet 'comfort zone'. This is the most wonderful enjoyment you could get, and it is definitely a great treat to yourself – simply because you deserve it! You become easily confused, tired, stressed and irritated when you are overwhelmed by busyness and speediness in your complicated day-to-day personal and business lives. Hence Zen is the best remedy, the best way to reward yourself if you really know how to love and treasure your BMB (body-mind-brain). In this modern age of IT, Zen Meditation is the easiest and most organic method in bringing balance, peace and fulfillment into your busy and hectic life.

Relatively speaking, Zen meditation can help you to sleep well, eat well and stay well. It can help you to distress yourself, it reduces your attachments and brings calmness, serenity and stability into your life. It is the best organic remedy that cures all modern *diseases*; it brings youth, liveliness and a stress-free healthy lifestyle back to you and your loved ones.

Ultimately, by practicing Zen, you will also attain Perfect and Supreme Enlightenment – a state of mind that is free from all worldly dissatisfaction and

suffering – a state of Total Freedom or Ultimate Wisdom, that was usually termed as “*Bodhi*” or “Awakening” in modern Buddhism.

Q: Wow, Zen is really good for us! So how do we enter into this door of Zen meditation?

A: There are many types of different meditation methods in this world. Almost all major religions have their own way to contemplate or meditate. In Islam for example, the aim of meditation (*fikr*) is to prevent the mind from going astray while the heart is focusing on the Glory of God. In Sufism, the spoken word (prayer, chant, song) is heavily emphasized as an active invocation of God through repetition of the Holy Names (*zikr*).

Christian forms of meditation have a long history, though not all practices are accepted universally in all churches. The simplest and most universal form of Christian meditation can be found in the practice of repeating prayers, either individually, together, or in a cycle. The practices of silence and fasting are regular practices within the Christian faith as well.

Hindu practitioners practice many different kinds of

yoga and meditative methods. There are different yogas such as Bhakti, Jhana, Karma etc. Equally valid, each approach is considered better suited for different types of people, yet all people may practice all forms of yoga, to varying degrees and at different stages of life. For Taoist practitioners, they use different traditional meditative practices associated with the Chinese philosophy and religion of Daoism, this include concentration, mindfulness, contemplation, and visualization. Techniques of Taoist meditation are historically interrelated with Buddhist meditation, for instance, 6th-century Taoists developed guan (觀 “observation”) or insight meditation from Tiantai Buddhist (天台) anapanasati (“mindfulness of breath”) practices.

So I belong to the lineage of Chinese Zen (Chan), a spiritual practice that could be traced from founder of Buddhism, Buddha Shakyamuni himself. The lineage of Chinese Zen (Chan) can be simplified in the following sequence:

Buddha Shakyamuni → Mahākāśyapa → Ānanda → Twenty Patriarchs of Indian and Chinese lines → Bodhidharma (1st Chinese Patriarch) → Huineng, the

6th Patriarchs → Five Schools of Chinese Chan → Two major cotemporary lineages → Dharma Master Hsin Tao (myself).

The Zen lineage is the passing down of the Great Light of Wisdom. In Zen, wisdom can be found within our daily life. Hence the Wisdom Zen is also a Living Zen – the Zen of Life. In this Zen of daily living, we learn to practice, experience and attain Awakening and Freedom within our day-to-day living. We let go of our negative emotions to return to our true nature of mind, and to manifest a very carefree and practical style of living from this realization.

In Zen, we have to be very real to ourselves and others. We need to face and meet with our naked self directly and spontaneously. In order to be Real and to attain your True Self, you have to learn to meditate. Meditation means being real and loving to yourself, to really spend some quality time to understand ourselves, to reconnect and touch ourselves at the core of our own being, with a very direct but yet gentle way. Since we are used to our disconnection with our True Self, it takes time for us to return to this carefree state of Total Freedom and Real Joy.

Come and meditate – so that you can return to your Original Self, your True Nature of mind and life. Remember this – “We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a physical experience.” Spirituality and spiritual well-being is the ultimate answer to all our physical problems, mental agony and material dissatisfaction. Come back to your own mind – now – it is the Source of all your peace and bliss. Zen meditation is the ultimate formula for your real happiness and total freedom.

Breathing in and out, mindfully and silently...

Q: Can you teach us how to meditate? How many stages are there in this meditation?

A: Let me introduce to you some practical steps.

There are four steps altogether. The first three are what we called “preliminary practices”, and the last one is the Main Practice.

Let's talk about the last one – the Main Practice first. I called it the Silent Practice of Mindful Listening (*Perfect Samadhi Absorption through Listening*, 耳根圓通). You can use this method to connect yourself to your spiritual self, your inner Buddha Mind. In this way, your ears faculty will be used as a bridge/platform to reach to your inner self. Then you listen with your whole heart. What/who is listening here? It's actually your Wakefulness (Awakening Nature) that is listening mindfully and quietly. Our Wakefulness is listening, and what is it listening to? Wakefulness is listening to Wakefulness – it is listening to itself, its own voice of Awakening. What we need to do is just listen to this wondrous sound of Silence, in which our Awakening Nature is listening to its own voice playfully and spontaneously.

When you listen carefully and mindfully like this, you can then understand the nature of Silence very well. You know and transcend this sound of Silence, and then you rest your mind peacefully and mindfully within its embrace. Just stay there for a while, and see what happens?

You've found the subject who is doing the listening –

the Unwavering Nature of Mind, that is never touched or moved or disturbed by any outer phenomena. This Wakeful state of mind, this Awakening Luminosity, is what you are listening to all the while! Now, recognize this Truth and abide/rest your mind into its peaceful Nature!

Now, let's talk about the three Preliminary Practices:

1st Step: Focus on your breathing.

Breathe in through your throat/mouth, and exhale through your nostrils. Inhale and exhale totally and mindfully. Use your whole heart and your whole physical being in doing so. FEEL that your whole being is doing the inhale and exhale. Breathe in through your throat, and feel the *Qi* energy coming up from your stomach to your heart and then to your throat level. Inhale slowly and totally in this way. Then you exhale slowly, mindfully and totally. You will feel very joyful if you practice this method correctly. We become unhappy and anxious, simply because we are breathing in a wrong and distorted way.

2nd Step: Use your mind to look at its own Nature

Pay attention to your thoughts –stabilize your monkey mind.

What is your mind and where is it now? You don't know it or you simply can't find it. So you have to train yourself to watch your own mind. You bring your attention gradually from the eyes to the nose, then to the mouth and to the mind, and then rest in that "objectless" state of watchfulness – this perfect state of total emptiness and great freedom. This is the pith instruction of our Zen meditation.

It's easy to bring your attention from your eyes to your nose, but how about bringing your attention from your nose to your mouth? What it means is that you have to 'look' with your mind's eyes – NOT with your physical eyes. And then, "use your mouth to look at your heart" (bring your attention from your mouth to your mind) – how can we do it? You have to do it with your mind. Use your mind to look at itself, so that it's true nature can be revealed to you by and by.

When I say look at your own mind, I ask you to do it with your gazing watchfulness. Lower down your focus, look with your eyes (and focus on this watchfulness),

and then shift your focus to your nose, then to your mouth, and then look at your own mind. When I said ‘mind’, it doesn’t mean ‘heart’ organ (the Chinese word for ‘heart’ and ‘mind’ are the same – *Xin*, 心). I simply ask you to look at your own wakefulness, your own watchfulness – this primordial awareness and myriad thoughts of your own mind. This is a process of shifting your attention.

At the end of this process, you will reach to the stage of “objectless” state of watchfulness – rest your mind in that state. Remember: the nature of mind has no forms, no substances, and no labels. It has no boundaries and has no certain place to abide or stay. It is totally free, flowing and unconditional. Rest your mind in this state of carefree dignity.

3rd Step – Awareness on your inhales and exhales

Have a clear, luminous and vivid clarity on this watchful awareness. Focus your mind totally on your inhales and exhales through your nostrils. Quietly observe it, patiently be with it – make it distinctively vivid, clear and mindful. Be mindful on your every breath. Don’t lose your mindfulness and awareness.

4th and last step – as mentioned before, Listen mindfully to the sound of Perfect Silence.

Listen with your ears faculty. There's no organ like your ears, which can distinctively differentiate between two extreme states of 'noisy' and 'quiet'. So you have to listen to these two states – the 'quietness' and the 'noisiness' of all phenomena. Listen to them quietly and equally.

You have two ears, and each of them is controlled by our left or right brain. Our left brains control our discriminative functions – our knowing, discriminative and rational functions; whereas our right brains are in-charge of our intuition, creativity and imaginations. When you practice this Silent Meditation, you can integrate and harmonize your left and right brains. You will become very intuitive and creative when you successfully integrate the functions of your left and right brains!

So just listen with your ears – quietly and mindfully! Listen to this wonderful sound of Perfect Silence! Relax your ears, head and shoulder. Straighten your spine, relax every single cell within your body. Quiet

down, let go of all thoughts, just relax. Listen, listen, and just listen! Listen peacefully and quietly, with a smile on your face. Listen naturally and effortlessly. Be with yourself. Bring your mind home.

Life and Death – the Transference from one Karmic Memory Body to Another

*(Your Karmic Memory Body = your
Inner RAM (Random Access
Memory) of Being*

The main purpose of Zen meditation is to find back our True Self, to return to our Original Face.

With Zen meditation, you could then attain the ultimate wisdom that enables you to liberate yourself from all problems and suffering, helping you to transcend the dualistic attachments and fear towards ‘life’ and ‘death’.

When you've attained the wisdom of Zen, you will realize and 'settle' all issues of living and dying, once and for all. You will gain utmost clarity and insights on these crucial issues. You'll attain ultimate peace, joy and perfect awakening.

Q: According to my extensive readings, Zen can also help us to become healthy and strong. HGH is a hormone naturally produced in the body, plentiful during childhood, but steadily decreasing throughout one's lifetime. HGH grows and sustains your organs and tissues; but starting sometime in our 40s, the amount of HGH secreted by the pituitary gland gradually slows. HGH in the form of injections may have undesirable side-effects; thus, getting our pituitary gland to produce more HGH is a safe, natural alternative. The good news is - Meditation has been shown to be effective at stimulating the pituitary gland to produce more of this anti-aging hormone, which is so vital for optimal health, longevity, youthfulness and vigor. What's Shifu's view on this?

A: Zen enables you to throw away all your physical, mental and spiritual toxins. It is a vital practice of purifying and balancing your body, mind and soul. You

will return to your Original Self if you practice Zen consistently and diligently. And who or what is your Original Self? It's actually your True Self, your true Nature of being, that doesn't belong to any physical form or your discursive thoughts.

Our lives are actually just some accumulation and gathering of mental information or memories, installed in a present body-mind combination that I call **Karmic Memory Body (KMB)**. In short, this KMB is actually our consciousness – like a computer chip that controls, contains and creates all relevant activities.

In the KMB of this present temporary life, we have both left and right brains. Our left brains control all our conscious, rational and analytical activities while we are awake in our daily life, while our right brains are in-charge of our memories and intuitive functions – it records all changes and happenings in our lives, and it also controls our subconscious activities such as dreams, traumas, imaginations, creativity etc.

So when you meditate, you optimize, refresh and reboot your KMB – including your left and right brains – hence you can integrate both of them and make them

work together and help each other harmoniously and beautifully. By the balancing power of Zen, you can integrate these two different human brains and make them more powerful and purposeful. You become the master of your KMB and not otherwise.

Our lives continue in this world of *Samsara*, and our every thought, feelings and perception are recorded within this memory chip of our KMB. Good and bad, ups and downs, joy and pains – all these dualistic phenomena and life experiences continue to happen in the time-space matrix of past, present and future. When this present KMB transforms itself into another form – it's the ending of the previous form – and we call it death; but when this happens, another new form of KMB is born – and this is what we called 'birth'. So life and death are NOT really two different concepts – they happen at the same time as well – in fact, they happen like this instantaneously almost ALL THE TIME!!!! Even now, this moment, you are experiencing the death of your previous thoughts and the birth of your current thoughts - isn't this pretty clear and logical for you?

So what is life and death? It's just a series of phenomena/activities that are transferred from one

Karmic Memory Body (KMB) to another. It is a fluid of information transference, much like the data transmission in your computer – where data are being transferred in the form of bits and bytes over a digital or analog medium, and it enables digital or analog communications as well as their movements between various devices.

And how do we remain calm, unmoved and peaceful when this data transference (the process of life and death) happen to us? First of all, don't create MORE chaotic data at the present moment. Don't make it messier. Just like Alan Watts once said,

“Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone”

Stay simple, stay cool and be contented with whatever happens at this moment. Just rest your mind in the newness of all phenomena. Watch them. Stay centered and unmoved. But you have to be open-up and NOT close down all your sensory feelings at the same time. Let everything happens by itself, what you need to do is just WATCH, that's all. Like the great meditation master Tilopa once said,

“Have a mind that is open to everything and attached

to nothing”.

This, in fact, is one of the most powerful meditation instructions that I've heard so far! Memorize it, embrace it, and bring THIS to your own meditative experience!

When I say 'Meditate', it means 'doing NOTHING' and NOT doing a thing. Return yourself to this unborn state of naturalness and uncontrived freedom. In this carefree state of peace and joy, you have no dualistic phenomena e.g. life vs. death, this vs. that, I vs. You etc to be grasped or attached to. In this state of purity, you are not creating any karma whatsoever, and there's nothing for you to adopt or to abandon. You are back to your home, your Source of 'zero' limit, which is also your pure and pristine Original Self – the primordial state of pure innocence and ultimate emptiness.

Within this state of peacefulness, you can begin to enjoy the benefits of Silent Meditation. Nothing comes, nothing goes. No movements, no turbulences, no fabricated creations. It's simply just Peace and Bliss. Just listen mindfully, just watch it wakefully. It's there all the time. And it will reveal its true nature to you,

once all dualistic experiences are dissolved into this great space of Silent Zen.

What can I say when you're in this state of Silent Zen?

“May the Force be with you !!!”

Some Stories of Silent Zen

Q: We are usually very obsessed and overwhelmed by events and outer phenomena in our daily life...we feel very tired of this but we can't seem to stop our thinking mind....

A: We have to learn to reduce our materialistic greed and attachments. We need to let go of our old habitual patterns. Let's go back to a natural, simple, pure and unpolluted way of Organic Life. This is really what we need. And then we should learn to LISTEN – or better still, practice Silent Meditation in our day-to-day living. Listen to the sound – or even the sound of silence itself – what are the lessons that it is trying to teach? Our inner spiritual life is rich and multi-dimensional. I really hope we can learn how to listen, watch, observe and experience our inner spiritual

essence. Spirituality is something to be enjoyed and treasured, the joy and fulfillment of Spirituality is a hundred times more satisfying than any material enjoyment that you could imagine!

Do it and try it for yourself.

Unlike material wealth or achievement, you can't practice meditation today and expect yourself to be enlightened the next day. Spiritual practice needs patience and diligence, and it takes guts and courage for you to get familiarized with this unexplored territory of well-being and richness within the untapped zones of your inner spiritual self.

What is 'Silence'?

Silence means absolute absence of sounds. How could that be? For example, if I hit the wooden fish (a Chinese Buddhist wooden instrument; 木魚) now – you will hear "Tok" !!! Is there a sound? Can you hear the sound made by the contact of this hammer and the wooden fish?

I asked you to listen to the sound of Silence just now. But now you hear "Tok!!!" – is there a sound or no sound? Yes, there's a sound! The only soundless sound

would happen when you LISTEN to the Sound of Silence. You may ask, “what’s the purpose of this listening?”

It is to purify your attachment that “there’s a sound to be listened to”. By doing this Silent Zen Meditation, you can use your habitual tendency of ‘hearing’ to purify your attachments towards the substance and substantiality of so-called ‘sound’.

I likened this method a transformative technique of breaking through your old ‘hearing’ and ‘thinking’ patterns, and trust me, it works quite well! Just like a space shuttle needs to break through the power of gravity in order to reach to the outer space, similarly, we must strive very hard in transcending all our negative habitual patterns in order to be liberated from all binding energies of this *samsaric* world.

I will now tell you some stories about Silent Zen Meditation.

Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一禪師) was a great Chinese Zen Master. His enlightenment-account was recorded in the Transmission of the Lamp (傳燈錄). A descendent patriarch of Huineng (the sixth patriarch)’s Zen lineage,

Mazu was an extraordinary Zen master who was famous for his direct and unorthodox method in pointing out the mind's essence.

Before his enlightenment, Mazu was diligently meditating in a temple and he did it on a daily basis. Zen Master Huairang passed by. He took a brick and sat on the rock facing Mazu, and started to rub it. Puzzled and confused, Mazu asked, "What are you doing?" Master Huairang said, "I'm rubbing the brick to make it a mirror."

Feeling even more confused and puzzled, Mazu then said, "You are crazy! How can you make a mirror by rubbing a brick?"

With a smile, Master Huairang answered,

"If I can't make a mirror by rubbing a brick, how can you achieve Buddhahood by merely sitting in meditation?"

Mazu became enlightened after receiving direct pointing-out instructions from this precious Zen master.

After he was enlightened, Mazu was very happy and he

wanted to share his realization with all his friends and relatives in his hometown. He went back to his hometown and was well-received by all his friends and relatives, but sadly, no one believes that he is an enlightened Zen master. Only his brother's wife had faith in him. She asked Mazu, "Can you teach me the Dharma?" Mazu noticed that she was a very busy housewife, who worked diligently day and night in the kitchen, so he said, *"Just hand an egg in your kitchen, listen to it every day – it has something to tell you. When you get its message, you will become enlightened!"*

So Mazu's sister in law did accordingly. She hung an egg in the kitchen and do her listening practice every day. She did this Silent Zen Meditation for more than ten years. One day, the rope that tied the egg was broken, the egg fall down and Booom! – She attain enlightenment at the very same moment!

So this is exactly what you need to do – just LISTEN!!! This is Silent Zen Meditation. Sitting there, doing nothing, just pay attention and LISTEN. Listen to the ultimate sound of silence, the soundless sound. When the rope of your wondering mind is broken, Boooooom!

– you will then attain the result of ultimate realization. This is the result of your meditation. This whole process is Silent Zen Meditation, and you attain the state of ultimate wisdom – there’s no inside and outside. Everything becomes clear and you become ONE with everything.

There’s also a story which I named “One Finger Zen”. Once upon a time there’s a Zen Master by the name of Juzhi Yizhi (俱胝一指). Master Juzhi raised his finger whenever he was asked a question about Zen. A boy attendant began to imitate him in this way. When a visitor asked the boy what his master had preached about, the boy raised his finger.

Very soon Juzhi heard about the boy’s mischief, one day he asked his boy attendant, “When I was not around, what did you do teach others about Zen?” The boy then raised his finger, Master Juzhi seized him and cut off his finger with a knife. As the boy screamed and ran out of the room, Juzhi called his name loudly. When the boy turned his head to Juzhi, Juzhi raised his own finger. In that instant the boy was spontaneously enlightened!

The attendant boy lost his finger forever, but he also

attained Perfect Joy of his ultimate realization. Is there any problem? No problem at all! Only enlightenment!!!

Q: When we sit together with you just now, everyone is so silent and peaceful. You taught us not to think so much, but still, I couldn't cut-off my habitual thinking. And when I started to wander, I became sleepy gradually. How should I deal with this problem?

A: Zen meditation will enable you to relax your mind. And when you become more and more relax, it's quite easy for you to fall asleep. When you have enough sleep, then you become more vigorous and spirited. That's ok actually. Remember the story I told you before – Zen Master Mazu asked his sister in law to listen to the egg? For about ten years, his sister in law only practices method of 'deep listening'. Just simply listen – with deep focus and undistracted peacefulness, just listen. Listen deeply with the attitude of joy and letting-go. You must practice this constantly and consistently, take your time, easy does it. Deepen your practice with more consistency and frequency. You are only about to listen just now, and that's a very short frame of time. You must continue this practice.

Q: I am quite a fresh student and new learner of Zen meditation, is it true that if I meditate long enough, my wondering thoughts will be reduced or eliminated?

A: You need to build up this positive habit of meditating. Focus – do it single-mindedly, and once you're familiarized with its patterns and cycles, you will enter into to the “freedom zone” of Zen; and your wondering thoughts will of course be reduced or even eliminated at that point. You will then feel, “Ah, why is it so comfortable to stay here? It's just like the feeling of coming home – you feel happy, cozy and carefree, you can be, do or have anything you want. You are a free person. You will be so comfortable and joyful that you forget all your negative emotions, troubles and hang-ups!!!

Egg Enlightenment and One Finger Zen

Q: I feel that I need to think deeper about the first story, but I think I understood its basic message. Generally, Silent Zen Meditation is truly a serious practice that I need to engage myself with. I can't fully grasp the full

meaning of the second story yet, chopping off other people's finger – what's that to do with enlightenment or realization? I don't quite understand.

A: The old monk's finger is a sign of Silent Zen, a true symbol of stillness and 'nothingness' (or emptiness), but the boy attendant's finger is a copycat, a sign of duplication and grasping to 'something'(existence). The boy thought, "As long as I can copy what my master did – that's Zen!" – and this is truly a manifestation of his own ignorant mind, not a mind of wisdom and clarity. He raised his finger just for fun, and this is definitely not a magical playfulness demonstrated by an enlightened person.

When Master Juzhi chop-off his "finger of existential attachment", he also asked the boy attendant "Is this how you teach others about Enlightenment? So show me – where's your finger now?" The boy attendant suddenly realized that he had lost his own finger, and at that moment, he realized that he had lost his attachment and emotional hang-ups as well. He attained and entered into the zone of spontaneous realization, "AH! There's nothing to be shown from the very beginning!!!" So this is a very deep, profound and meaningful Zen lesson.

One finger, One Zen, and One Enlightenment!

Q: In your first story, the egg broke and she got enlightened upon hearing the sound, so what did she realized or attained at that particular moment? Is it all pointed to the realization of “emptiness” or “nothingness? Whether it is Zen or Zen meditation, is it this nothingness or emptiness that we need to realize or attain?

A: Realization means you go beyond all confusions and misunderstanding. You become clear and you are no more confused about all things and all phenomena. You fully understand and comprehend the reality and the true essence of all myriad things. Do you know how a spaceship launches its journey into the outer space? In space, rockets zoom around with no air to push against. What’s going on? Rockets and engines in space behave according to Isaac Newton’s third law of motion: Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction. Yes, a small amount of thrust does push the spacecraft forward, but it often takes a great deal of fuel to get going anywhere quickly.

So in short, you need fuel – lots of fuel to launch your

Zen meditation practice. This fuel is your consistent practice. We call it “ten years kung-fu” in Chinese – it means a lot of efforts, hard-work and it will take you a lot of time to do the necessary practice. And when you attain so-called Enlightenment or Realization, you then achieve total freedom; a state of being that is free from all conditions and limitations. You are no more bound or conditioned by your physical, mental, emotional or material conditions. Your eggs of illusion and confusion breaks down, and BOOM!!! – you achieve the essence of Zen.

When you listen quietly to the messages of the egg (s), you are connected directly to the entry point(s) of Silent Zen Meditation. So even the finger (in the 2nd story) is also a conductor, a guide post; a fundamental seed that you’ve planted into your enquiring consciousness. It is the basic cause that you have, and when you imbue it with the practice or process of Silent Meditation, a ‘Formless’ result will be the fruition of that meditation. When we say ‘Formless’ - it doesn’t mean ‘nothing’. It is an inner state of mind that goes beyond all forms and labels, but there’s still an ‘I’ involved here – a subject that is free from all these

dualistic objects, the outer phenomena. Formlessness doesn't mean Nothingness, but it is the function of this very Emptiness. Remember this: the Universe is thought to consist of the totality of Nothingness and Existence – it is a holistic embodiment of All That Is. This is the essential meaning of the Universe.

If you want to realize the great Tao – the Truth, then you must know how to become one with the whole Universe. How could we achieve that? You must then enter and become one with the Essence of all things. And what is Emptiness, the great *Shunyata*? It is simply the pure innermost essence of all phenomena.

For example, all matters in this Universe will dissolve into nothingness one day – so this nothingness is Emptiness – from Existence to Emptiness, from appearances to nothingness. And where does this Emptiness go at the end? It will then return into the Ultimate Reality itself, which is neither empty nor exist, neither appear nor disappear. It is as it is, and in Buddhism we give it a very beautiful name – “*Suchness*”. This *Suchness* is our True Nature of Mind, and it is also the True Nature of all phenomena. But in order to enter into this *Suchness* of *All That Is*, we

need a method to rely upon. We need to do some practice. Here, the practice that I recommended is ‘Silent Zen Meditation’.

Your normal breathing style is usually short, fast and imbalanced. But when you breathe in this way, your breath becomes very smooth, long and soft.

Q: You asked us to breathe through our throat, and our *Qi* actually flows from our energy center, our *dantian*, but actually where do we store our energy or *Qi*? Do we inhale it and store it at the *dantian*, or we just inhale it from *dantian* through our throat?

A: No matter where the *Qi* comes from, just focus on your throat and inhale it through that area. By and by you will get natural in doing this, and you will feel the positive effects by then. You need some guidance in terms of the technique, and you need some practices to get familiarized with it. Just focus on your throat. If you can really breathe in and out by using this method, then your breath becomes very long, deep and smooth. Your *Qi* becomes very stable and deep. You could easily spend more than a minute to just breathe in the air – yes, it could be that long and soothing!

- Q: Breathe through our throat or mouth? Should we open our mouth during meditation?
- A: No, you have to breathe in using your nose, not with your mouth. You need not open your mouth, just inhale and exhale naturally. As I mentioned before, you need to familiarize with it by doing more frequent and more consistent practices.
- Q: When we shift our focus from our eyes, nose, mouth and to our mind at the end, I can't breathe naturally and why's that? Are these separate steps or should I do it partly one by one?
- A: Just keep breathing naturally will do. Follow the guideline; integrate these four steps into one consequential movement. The sequence is arranged in a very useful and practical way, it has its purposes and functions.
- Q: Should we do this repeatedly? How long should we take to do one circle of breathing in and out?
- A: You might feel quite sleepy in the beginning, to ensure you get enough oxygen, so I suggest you do it seven rounds – inhale and exhale as one round, repeat it at

least seven times.

Q: How about shifting our focus from the eyes to the nose, to the mouth, to the mind and at the end dissolves all objects of contemplation – should we do it seven rounds as well?

A: Oh, this method is used just to tame your monkey mind. You can do it repeatedly until you feel comfortable. When you feel at ease, then focus your awareness on your breathe. Then do the Silent Zen Meditation. But remember to relax in this process – relax your ears, head, and shoulder – relax every part and every organ of your body. Relax your body gradually, then enter into the state of Silent Meditation. If you feel sleepy, go back to the 1st step – do some deep breathing. If you are energized and spirited, then continue your Silent Meditation. If you are tired and feel asleep, then focus on your breathing again. Do these two alternately. Get it now?

Kick your Mind and Make it Enlightened!

Q: Besides sitting meditation and doing the Silent Zen Meditation, is there any method that we could use so that we could also experience the essence of Zen – with the joy and stillness it brings – in our daily activities? Can we also experience the joy of Zen while we are working or driving?

A: We call our method “Peace Zen” – you can practice it three times a day, each time 9 minutes (a cycle); You can do it anytime, anywhere. You don’t have to cross your legs while meditating. Sit in any posture or position, even standing is also ok.

We have two ways in practicing Zen. When you are still, sit and meditate. When you are in movements, contemplate and be aware in these movements – this is what I called ‘dynamic meditation’. This Dynamic Meditation is to be practiced in all activities during your day.

The contemplation of Dynamic Meditation has four components:

- 1) Mindfulness of Body;
- 2) Mindfulness of Feelings;

3) Mindfulness of Mind; and

4) Mindfulness of Dharma.

If you practice this Four Mindfulness well, you'll attain the truth of suffering, emptiness, impermanence and egoless-ness.

For example, we are so attached to this body, this physical form. But when we die, this body is just like a cloth that we must get rid of. And then we change our clothes to some new ones – probably a new physical form of a bird, a duck, a cow or a worm – who knows? Our identities are in constant flux of changes and transformations since we are all travelers in this *samsaric* realm. So what form is the Real You? Where's the 'I' that I am so attached to? What's my true identity?

Our physical forms and identities in this *samsaric* world are all transient and temporary, so we need to seek for our True Self. In Buddhism, our True Self is actually 'No Self' – the state of egoless-ness.

Just like what was said in the Diamond Sutra:

“All conditioned existence are like dream, illusion, bubbles, shadow, and as dewdrop or lightning, they

should be regarded as such...”

This is exactly what we need to practice in our daily life. If you can do it, then you are liberated from the confused state of mind, that is constantly hankering and attached to the four labels – which are the labels or concepts of *a self, a person, a sentient being, or a life span*.

I am a very practical master of Zen. I focus on the functionality and practical practices of Zen, NOT the theory or concepts of Zen. How can we attain Enlightenment? How could we liberate ourselves from life and death? These are the things I am interested. I want to use my experience of Zen to teach and share with all of you. I am passing down a living lineage of Zen Experience – which you could use, practice and attain it in your day-to-day living, here and now.

Buddhadharma is for us to practice and attain its taste of Joy and Wisdom, not to be understood through intellectual pursuits for improving your knowledge. Zen is about the practices of Calm Abiding and Special Insights, the *Shamatha* and *Vipasyana*. It is about gaining the ultimate wisdom, which is sharp, open,

bright and liberating. This Ultimate Wisdom could dissolve all barriers and obscurations. So I encourage you to be the practitioner of the Dharma and NOT a scholar of its theories. Attain your own inner wisdom; use it to liberate yourself and others from all confusions and ignorance. Wisdom is always illuminating and liberating, but mundane knowledge always bind you with so many dualistic concepts and complicated labels.

To be a Dharma practitioner doesn't mean that you have a privilege NOT to experience worldly phenomena such as sickness and death. Our life events are the accumulation of our own karma – it is the combinations of all things dualistic and extremes, good and bad, ups and downs. As long as we are trapped in this *samsara*, we have to go through all these. But since we are Dharma practitioner and we understand the law of karma as well as the universal truth of Cause and Effects, we must prevent ourselves from committing non-virtuous karma and try our best in accumulating positive actions of our body, speech and mind. By upholding the Five Precepts and the Ten Virtues, we build a solid foundation of our moral conducts, from which we

launch our long journey of Enlightenment and Liberation.

Each and every thought and every concept of ours is actually a realm of cyclic existence, a *samsaric* realm by itself. Your current life form is decided by your previous causes and conditions – if you have ignorance, you're born as an animal; if you have strong desires and stingy mind, you become a hungry ghost; if you are overwhelmed by hatred and anger, you'll be reborn in a hell realm. So our minds create our world that we live in.

Hence it is very important for us to accumulate virtuous karma. If you have a kind heart, you'll have virtuous actions derived from your body, speech and mind – and you would definitely attract positive environment, people or even a higher life form.

As the Buddha once said,

***Create no evil, cultivate all good, and purify the mind.
These are the teachings of the Buddha.***

In short, to practice means we are dedicated in the inner work of purifying our own deluded mind. Once your

mind is pure and clear, you'll be manifesting loving kindness and compassion wherever you go – and auspicious causes and conditions will be attracted by you and your actions as well! 'Mind Purification' is what we need to as daily practice in our day-to-day living.

Some said Zen is about inner cultivation, some said Zen is outer contemplation – but in my opinion, Zen is actually a Mind Training or Mind Contemplation. In Zen, we turn our attention inwardly, to look at our own mind, nakedly and directly.

Our mind is within us, but strangely, we don't know where it stays. So we need these Four Steps of Peaceful Zen in order to tame our own mind, to point at it directly, and then to know and understand its own nature slowly but surely.

So what is actually attainment? If you can keep your Primordial Awareness silently, mindfully and single-pointedly during a Buddhist ceremony (Dharma assembly) or when you are working, you might attain instant enlightenment there and then! Some Zen master got enlightened when he kicked a rock, some became

enlightened by hearing the sound of bamboo cracking... In short, when you kick your mind, or give your mind some ‘shocking grace’ - it burst-out opens, and BOOM!!! - You attain some sudden enlightenment!

This sudden awakening experience happens when you become aware of the truth and sees everything “as it is” without any filtering of the information. This is a profound liberating experience; an “Aha!” moment that immediately shifts your old perception and gives you the direct access to the ultimate truth.

Your Own Naked Mind

There’s also a Zen story (*koan*) from the Tang Dynasty. One Day, a nun by the name Xuanji (Mystical hint, 玄機) went to pay a visit to Zen Master Xuefeng (Snowy Peak, 雪峰). She bowed to the Zen master and was about to leave, but the Zen Master decided to test her realization. Master Xuefeng asked her, “Hey, where do you come from?” The nun replied, “I came from the Da-re (Great Sun) Mountain.”

Zen Master asked again, “Is there a sunrise at the Da-re Mountain?” The nun replied, “If there’s a Sun now, the

Snowy Peak will melt straight away!”

The great Zen master continued, “Your name is Xuanji, the Mystical Hint (which Ji, 機 also means machine; in this case, the weaving machine.) – So I ask you – how much clothes do you weave each day?”

The nun answered, “NO. Nothing at all, just like my mind – totally naked without a thing! Clean and naked, bare and spotless, there is no way it can be grasped!!!” “She walked away without looking back. Then the Zen Master shouted at her, “Hey Venerable Xuanji!!! Your robe is dropping onto the ground now!” The nuns turned back and look, and suddenly Master Xuefeng said,

“Look at your own mind now - Clean and naked, bare and spotless, there is no way it can be grasped!!!”

But it's NOT that easy to gain this state of realization. A qualified Zen Master will know if you're enlightened or not just by looking at your mental state. If you still have any grasping or hang-ups, you're still trapped in this mundane world of ignorance and confusions!

So please meditated as frequent as you can, keep your mind pure and clear, and please contemplate the

meaning of this Zen poem:-

The spring flowers, the autumn moon; Summer breezes, winter snow. If useless things do not clutter your mind, You have the best days of your life.

(by Huikai Zen Master, Song Dynasty.)



Just Relax! We are ONE. - A relaxing moment at the Parliament of World's Religions held in Australia, 2009.

2nd Dialogue

The Interdependent Origin of the Dharma Lineage

The Origin of Ling Jiou Mountain

Q: Ling Jiou Mountain is a very beautiful and natural Zen place; it's so nice that we can practice Zen meditation here. Can you tell us about its origin?

A: Ling Jiou Mountain was a very unique mountain that

was covered by many special trees and mystical plants. Some of them grow as high as 3,000 meter. When I first came here, people told me: this place is full of ghosts and spirits! You won't stay here for more than two weeks! It sounded really scary in the beginning, but you know, I am a person who dare to take some risks.

After finishing my fasting retreat, I actually wanted to go back to Yulan. But this mountain is so special, and it made me wanted to stay longer and longer, and it inspired me to make a very special vow. I had always needed a place to start my Dharma activities, and now I had found it – it is in this place that I had generated the great *Bodhicitta*(the *Bodhi* Mind) – the Supreme Enlightened Attitude to save and liberate all mother sentient beings.

Before I came to this place, I was merely a so-called 'selfish' practitioner – I focus only on my own personal liberation. I care a lot about my own well-being. That's all, there's no *Bodhi* Mind whatsoever. I only generated my *Bodhi* Mind when I encountered the beauty and sacred energy of this mountain. This is truly a very sacred mountain, imbued with some very special

spiritual energy or Qi. It is the harmonious unification of Heaven, Earth and Human – the Sacred Trinity in Taoist philosophy.

Local folks would come and invite ‘fire’ from this mountain as their yearly Taoist routine, and it happens at least every twelve years. So it was already a very sacred mountain long before I came. We also placed a Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) statue that we invited from Puto Mountain (Potala) in China, so I decided to make it my principal base in starting my Dharma activities.

I have no special skills other than Zen Meditation and the practice of Great Compassion Dharani (大悲咒). Everybody knew this. So Ling Jiou Mountain is actually a Meditation Centre, a Dharma place for serious Zen Meditation practice and a base of propagation of **Daily Living Zen** (生活禪). I have a special karmic connection with this sacred mountain, so I wanted to make this holy place for all of you to cultivate and nurture your own Bodhi Mind! This is a sacred space dedicated to ALL - A special place of cultivating compassion and practicing Zen Meditation.

All my merits, all my accomplishment are due to my

practices of a special mantra, the Great Compassion Dharani (大悲咒), which is the auspicious incantation of Guanyin Bodhisattva. It was and still is my personal main practice.

I practice Great Compassion Dharani (大悲咒) when I was meditating in the graveyard; and I also did the same practice whenever I had my meditation or fasting retreats. We are organizing ‘A Million Great Compassion Dharani Retreat’ in Ling Jiou every year, and we welcome everyone to join us if you are free and interested. Every part of this mountain, the rocks, the ocean, the mountain – they are blessing us with their spiritual energy or *qi*; and sometimes they show us various auspicious signs as well! When these signs appear, I feel that they are the indications that the Dharma protectors are quite happy as well!

As I always said,

“If our society becomes peaceful, if human mind becomes kind and virtuous, the whole universe would be delighted in grace and beauty!”

As Zen practitioners, our job is to enhance and increase the well-being of this world, NOT to change anyone or

anything. Just shine on, and all phenomena will transform and uplift themselves naturally and inevitably!

Q: Thank you for sharing with us. You mentioned that after you had experienced and internalized your own understanding with the essence of Zen, did you feel easier for you to propagate Zen Meditation in a more systematic way?

A: Yes. I am giving some talks and teachings on Zen these few years in Germany, and people there find that my method of teaching is quite practical and systematic. There's a Zen Meditation Center where its abbot is a Christian priest, but mind you, he is also the heir of a Zen lineage from Master Jinghui (Pure Wisdom) from China. He is the 45th lineage holder of Lingji (Rinzai) Zen lineage. This more than ninety year old man has a well-established Zen Meditation Center. Some of his students came and learned from me.

This old Zen Teacher once asked me, "If a sentient being dies, he or she will attain Nirvana immediately – do you agree?" I had a little doubt, but then I answered "Yes!"

Q: Can we attain Nirvana even without any Dharma

practice?

A: From the perspective of Zen – yes. From other perspectives, then the answer is NO. If you don't practice, you don't change, and how could you attain liberation by holding on with your old habitual pattern? But from the perspective of Zen, anything is possible. You cannot attain Nirvana if you still have dualistic attachments. But for Zen – even concepts and labels can be used and transformed into the pure perception of ultimate Zen! So if we can accept this premise, then when you die, of course you are in the state of Nirvana straight away. But I told him at the end, *“Even the word ‘Nirvana’ is NOT necessary here!!!”*

Q: So In Zen, there's NO dualistic mind?

A: This is actually what we called 'Huatou' (話頭, 'head of speech' or 'point beyond which speech exhausts itself') in Zen. The old Zen Teacher was actually testing me, and this was definitely a very auspicious connection. I always had a close karmic connection with Christian Benedictine society. As the disciple of Master Jinghui, he is also the heir and lineage holder

of Master Xuyun (虛雲, the Empty Cloud)'s Zen lineage, So this is basically our close and auspicious connection!

Teachers in Zen Meditation

Q: You seem to have a lot of teachers, but who was your first meditation master?

A: As you already knew, yes, I have a lot of Buddhist masters. There are all my so-called 'noble men'. I had my faith on the path, simply because I was inspired and influenced by my Precept brother, a monk by the name of Venerable Renhai (仁海法師). He was a very important teacher in my life.

Q: Ven. Renhai transmitted the Dharma to you, and after that you begun your Zen practice of Silent Illumination (默照禪)?

A: That's right.

Q: You had went through tremendous difficulties due to this method that he had taught you, am I right?

A: What I've realized today, I owe it to this method that

he taught me. All merits go to Ven. Renhai. When he taught me the essence of Zen, he told me that this is a ‘One to One Transmission’, and I found it quite powerful and meaningful. His transmission and teaching were rare, precious and utterly auspicious. I decided to practice in accordance with his teaching, and then I gained tremendous positive results out from it. Once the momentum was started, you can’t stop even if you want to! This Zen practice, this method, is so strong and forceful that you are totally overwhelmed and submerged by it – once the *qi* or energy is invoked, you are in it for more than a hundred percent! There’s no way you could use other methods after this.

Q: Can you explain more on the method Ven. Renhai had taught you? How did you recognize him as your principal teacher?

A: I received my monk’s vows from Fo Guang Shan (佛光山) lineage, and we were having our precept ceremonies at Fayun (法雲寺, Dharma Cloud) Monastery in Taichung at that time. Ven. Renhai also was one of the preceptees too. He came from Hong Kong and was a disciple of Master Daoyuan (Dharma

Source, 道源老和尚) from Jilung (基隆). He said he had no proper Zen lineage, but he had been practicing some tantric esoteric methods by his own, and he would like to transmit some important tantric secret practices to me and another Dharma brother of mine. This Dharma brother was a monk by the name of Huiyu (Wisdom Universe, 慧宇); but unfortunately, he was not ready and unwilling to receive this transmission. Although Renhai had more connection with Huiyu, and I was definitely not a very brilliant and intelligent student of him; but I insisted that he transmit whatever he had to me.

I would always look for Ven. Renhai whenever I was free. He agreed to teach me one day. Renhai told me that he had two Dharma lineages – one is *Tumo* (Inner Heat) practice; which promised the accomplishment of ‘Rainbow Body’, and another lineage is none other than the practice of Zen. He asked me, “Which one do you want?” I said, “Give me all!” – so this was how I received his transmission and teachings.

But most importantly, he had passed me a copy of the Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra) as a symbolic item of the Dharma transmission. In Zen

tradition, the Dharma transmission couldn't be complete without the passing down of the essential teachings of the Diamond Sutra.

Q: No one in Fo Guang Shan knew about this?

A: No. None of them knew about this.

Q: You said the Diamond Sutra represents the true essence of Zen, why is it so?

A: Simply because the Six Patriarch Huineng (六祖慧能), the transmission of Zen

Lineage is marked by the handing down of this important Sutra, so the Sutra plays an important role as a symbolic item for the Dharma transmission.

In short, there are two kinds of Dharma transmission. The first one is the visible transmission, which I already explained. The second one is the invisible transmission, which is the Dharma itself – it is something that you need to practice, contemplate and attain by your own efforts. The visible transmission is the transmission of the method or the practice; and by following this method or practice, you'll then accomplish the invisible Dharma – which is the fruition of your efforts. The

whole process from the visible to the invisible is what we call ‘gradual practice’ (漸修) in Zen, and by doing this gradual practice, in this case the Silent Illumination (默照), you aim to attain the ‘Sudden Awakening’ (頓悟) – which is the fruition or the invisible Dharma.

A: And what is that accomplishment when we attain it?

Q: From the visible to the invisible – we attain the fruition of non-dual state of mind, the union of these two is the Middle Path.

A: They said Shifu felt connected to this method, but then you had to go through all sorts of painful experiences?

Q: I went through tremendous hardship; simply because I didn’t follow the instructions carefully! If I did my practice in accordance with the instructions, then that would be much easier. Ven. Renhai passed away too early, about a year after he gave me the transmission. I had no one to consult or discuss. So I had to practice by my own. Since I have no guru or teacher in the whole process, I had made many mistakes here and there. But I was fortunate to meet many great Dharma masters in later days, who had corrected me along the way. I had received some very great instructions, but I

was lack of understanding and realizations. These masters corrected me and they helped to enhance and complete my understanding and realization.

Q: Shifu, you said that you felt connected to this practice (Silent Illumination) – is this why you had faith in it?

A: Yes, you had a connection, and you gained faith from there, that's why you were inspired to practice it constantly and consistently.

Q: How did you know that Ven. Renhai had attained any realization? Are you really sure?

A: Oh I don't have a slightest idea whether he was enlightened or not! But the Dharma transmission that I received was indisputably pure and authentic, that's all that matter. Ven. Renhai was touched by my inquiring spirit. He asked me, which one do you want – Tantric practice or Zen meditation? I said I want both of them, and he passed them down to me, and these two methods are very precious and rare Dharma gems. So I really appreciate that a lot. My main focus and interest at that time was Zen but not Tantric teaching. I didn't practice any Tantra at that time. So he gave me this copy of Diamond Sutra as a proof of the Dharma

transmission. Since then, I became the lineage holder of the Zen of Silent Illumination.

Q: Is there any contradiction between these two different practices?

A: For Ven. Renhai there's no contradiction, his main focus is Tantric practice and he was not a Zen practitioner.

Q: How could he attain realization if he himself didn't do the practice?

A: He had his own special method, and he had a very authentic way of practicing it – so as a whole, he had some experiential insights.

Q: So when you took him as your first guru, is it official or non-official?

A: It is considered to be quite official; it is a one-to-one special transmission of Dharma. It was almost like a story in some *kungfu* legends.

Q: I also heard that you are inspired deeply by Master Hsin Yun (星雲) while you were staying in Fo Guang Shan. You are deeply touched and motivated by his

charisma and great vows in propagating the Dharma.

A: I had two important Dharma books at that time – the biography and life stories of Grand Master Taixu (太虛, the Great Way) and the biography and life stories of Grand Master Xuyun (虛雲, Empty Cloud). I wanted to know what expectation did Master Hsin Yun had on me, so I brought these two books to him and asked, “Which one should I study?” and Master Xing Yun answered, “It’s all up to you.”

By this answer, I knew that I had a choice. I could choose who I wanted to become. Since Master Xu Yun was a very serious and accomplished meditator and I also like to meditate, I choose to be more engaged in Buddhist Meditation and Contemplations. That has become my main direction of Dharma up until now.

Q: What had you experienced or learned while you were in Fo Guang Shan?

A: There was a Zen retreat (Zazen) for seven days at the Tsung Lin Monastic College at that time. Master Nan Huaijing (南懷瑾老師) conducted the retreat. I had some very delightful experiences and unique insights during this period of time. Master Nan’s main teaching

and lineage is Patriarch Zen (祖師禪).

Q: In terms of propagating the Dharma, you seemed to be not so engaging in the beginning, what makes you change your mind and get more involved in propagating the Dharma now?

A: In Chinese we say it's the blessing of the Trinity – the combined harmony of Heaven (time), Earth (environment) and Human (harmony). When all conditions are ripened, then things and events will flow naturally and inevitably. Helpful conditions appeared, and suitable people also came together to make it happen.

Q: Helpful conditions? Can you tell us more about that?

A: 'Harmony of People' – the conducive human factor, are the real helpful conditions. I had been doing retreats in a few places, and some disciples would follow me wherever I went. I was meditating at the graveyards at that time, about 18 hours every day. I took one meal a day if I had time. And then the first temple, Jiguang (Silent Light, 寂光寺) was offered to me. A few old ladies came and supported me, and my first ordained disciple Ven. Faxing (Dharma Nature, 法

性) was also there with me. Faxing had great connection with many people, and quite some disciples were there with her to support me as well.

I was having a Silent retreat and I seldom communicate with them. We need some supplies to continue my retreat and we need to connect with people in order to survive. I wanted to do more restricted retreats, including some fasting and strict meditation, so I came to Ling Jiou Mountain at Fulong (福隆). I did my silent fasting retreat there for two years. First I wanted to do it for only a year, but it felt good after a year, so I decided to extend it for another extra year. I had nothing when I first reached Ling Jiou Mountain, but when I came out from my retreat, as I mentioned, many helpful conditions had arrived, right people and right conditions just happened naturally and effortlessly, and I was quite grateful for all these auspicious connections.

Q: You have to do a lot of retreats, and at the same time you have to save so many sentient beings, how do you keep your faith alive?

A: My faith and confidence come from the Dharma. It's the Dharma that gives me strength to continue. From

my faith in the Dharma, I gain my ability in practicing and knowing the Dharma; and my understanding and belief grow from my ability; and at the end, you'll surely attain what you've understood, realized and believed. Once you have faith, you must go ahead and just do it. And then you will have some understanding, with more and more practices, you can attain some realization at the end. In short, you have to go through this process:

**Believe (Faith) → Understanding →
Meditation/Practicing the Dharma →
Attainment/Realization**

Q: Where does this power of the mind come from? Is it a kind of connection?

A: Yes. You are connected to the power of the Dharma.

Before I did my retreat in Ling Jiou Mountain, my life was just a gathering of all sorts of messiness, confusions and complicated entanglements. But after I completed my fasting retreat, I began to know and feel that there's NO separation between my life and my Dharma practices. The Dharma and my life had become one inseparable unity – they had become ONE

complete thing.

You have to be passionate about learning and opening up yourself, and try to implement the Dharma you learn into your daily life – this is Living Zen. Be totally engaged and involved in every aspects of life, and yet maintaining your self-awareness and vivid mindfulness. This is the Zen way in living a beautiful and meaningful life.

Look at me, a person like me who had nothing whatsoever, who had found his life missions and visions in this *samsaric* world – so if I can do it, you can do it as well. So let me become your model and example, and make my life stories as your inspiration and encouragement.

After the establishment of the Museum of World Religions, my duty of helping and guiding others become so effortlessly simple, meaningful and natural at the same time.

Q: It's quite hard for common people to generate faith or belief in their mind – how could we help others to believe in the *Buddhadharma*?

A: We need some karmic connection (緣) here. The process of attainment of Dharma is the same for all **(Believe (Faith) → Understanding → Meditation/Practicing the Dharma → Attainment/Realization)**. Generally speaking, you have faith/belief because you've met the Dharma – and Dharma is simply the best solution for all your worldly and spiritual problems. If you understand and apply into your life the essence of Dharma, you will definitely gain peace and happiness; this joy or bliss of Dharma will definitely generate or enhance your faith.

Q: So in short, we must experience the joy of Dharma first in order to obtain an unshakable faith? You'd encountered many difficulties in life, but I can feel that you are authentically joyful inside-out – what's your secret?

A: My only secret is my Dharma practice – just DO IT. My best solution to all troubles in life is to practice the Dharma. Dharma is the best and only medicine that can cure dis-eases and dissatisfactions in this life. When and how should I do my Dharma practice? Well, it depends on YOU solely. You have to put in some

efforts. You have to be committed in your Dharma practice. You have to engage yourself in the three trainings of Listening, Contemplation and Meditation. Remember this: Dharma is the only solution to your problems in life, and to attain the Dharma, you must first put it into serious practice. That's all. It all depends on YOU!

My Guru-disciple Relationship with Grand Master Hsin Yun

Q: I read news about you and Grand Master Hsin Yun – you are so humble, grateful and respectful toward the Grand Master...

A: He is my Dharma Master. I am quite old now, but to have an old master as your Dharma teacher is a wonderful thing! I still considered myself as his humble disciple, I feel happy about our guru-disciple relationship. I will always go back FGS to visit him whenever I am free. Master Hsin Yun was the monk who ordained me as *Bhikkshu*; I inherited the

Mahayana Zen lineage from him and I was inspired by him in many ways. Thinking about this always makes me humble and joyful!

Before I studied in FGS's monastic college, I told me self: "let's find an accomplished *Arahat* and make him my guru!" – I spent tremendous efforts and energy, looking everywhere in Taiwan but couldn't find any.

Then I decided to do some Dharma studies and practices, and I saw a FGS advertisement in local newspaper. They were recruiting Dharma students for their Monastic College. I was still a layman and had no money to enroll myself into this renowned Buddhist institute. One monk told me, "If you become a monk, then it would be all free – you don't have to pay anything!" So I decided to become a monk and I was then ordained by Master Hsin Yun himself. I was not a bright student at that time, but due to his great kindness and compassion, Master Hsin Yun accepted me unconditionally. I was so grateful to him. I didn't meet any *Arahat*, but I was so lucky to had met Master Hsin Yun – who was such a great Bodhisattva, a living Buddha! What an auspicious connection!

While I was studying in the Monastic College, Master Hsin Yun's speech and actions inspired and touched me in many aspects. His wisdom and compassion had planted the *Bodhi* seeds in me consciously – deeply and pervasively. I learned a bit about *Buddhadharma* here and there before I became a monk, I also learned about some Buddhist rules and precepts when I was visiting and staying in some Buddhist temples. The whole scenarios shifted and transformed into some happy moments of intensive learning when I was ordained as a monk in FGS, and Master Hsin Yun guided and taught me many meaningful and practical teachings of Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教). His way of teaching was so practical, simple and humanistic. My current missions and visions are very much influenced by whatever I had learned in FGS. Due to Master Hsin Yun's focus and emphasis on Dharma education and Dharma propagation, these two areas are also my main missions at this point of time.

Although I only spent about a year in the FGS Monastic College, but I remember that Master Hsin Yun hired some top class teachers to teach us. He would also played basketball with us during rest hours, and he

would also carry some cement with us while we were building the Dharma hall. He was such a great example and a living Bodhisattva. We learned a lot and we laugh a lot during that period of time – and I am so grateful to Master Hsin Yun's kindness and compassion!

Although the Monastic College was organized for only one year, but it seemed like it was specially designed to welcome us as the latest batch of young monks and nuns. There were about eighty of us altogether; and about forty of us managed to carry on. Now, almost all these monks have become well-known and talented teachers in many places all over the world, contributing their knowledge and skills in various areas of Buddhism – all due to the guidance and kindness of our precious guru – Master Hsin Yun.

Among my fellow Dharma brothers were: Ven. Chuanxiao, Ven. Chaofan, Ven. Huiyu, Ven. Hongyi etc. We were good friends and very closed to each other. We always helped and encouraged each other. Today, most of us are still very active in propagating or disseminating the Dharma. Some abandoned the monk's vows but most of us are still monks and nuns. We have one thing in common – we never forget our Zen lineage

and its teachings!

When I was doing my retreat at Yuanming Temple, some of my classmate donated their money to support my daily living costs. I was so grateful to Ven. Huiyu, as he had donated all his scholarship money (the total of 800 dollar) to me so that I could buy a motorbike. When I shifted to a pagoda near a graveyard, Ven. Chaofan and Ven. Congzhi accompanied me for about a month, and only left when I was getting used to my environment. I remembered I had an argument with Ven. Chuanxiao and I told him, “You’re so lousy in Sutra Chanting!” He became very angry at that time. But in later days, he became very famous in Sutra Chanting. Ven. Shouyu, Ven. Congzhi and me were more interested in meditation practices – hence our Dharma missions and visions are almost identical. There are so many great stories and sweet memories to share with all of you!

A Living Great Bodhisattva

We had many strange experiences at that time. The strangest experience happened at the Great Compassion Hall in FGS. All students were staying together in this

hall, about 11:00 PM every day, you could hear some strange sounds – sometimes it was the sound of the wooden fish, sometimes the sound of hitting the Zen stick or even some drumming sound. One very quiet night, I and Ven. Huiyu heard some sound of people hitting the drum. We ran out quickly to have a look – but no one was there! We felt puzzled, turned to each other and said, “We better run – NOW!”

So the bells and drums in Great Compassion Hall would make some sounds although there was nobody hitting them. And sometimes we witnessed some auspicious light coming out from the shrine hall as well. From these experiences, we knew that FGS was truly a sacred land blessed by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and protected by all *devas* and spirits as well. It was a place full of positive sacred energy, which would attract thousands and thousands of visitors, students and devotees. The development and successes of FGS today validates our visions and experiences.

I am so grateful that I could spend my early days in studying and practicing the Dharma in FGS. I was quite a so-called ‘small-minded’ practitioner before I entered FGS, and I had learned how to be selfless and

compassionate since then, and I am now willing to be committed to the missions and responsibilities of spreading and preserving the purity and validity of the *Buddhadharma*.

Hsin Yun is the greatest example in global Buddhist movement, and he is considered one of the most prominent proponents of Humanistic Buddhism. His insightful, engaging, and witty lectures unfailingly endear him to audiences. He reminds us that to transform our world, we must be actively engaged in it. Besides being a prolific writer, Venerable Master Hsing Yun is an outspoken proponent of equality among all people and religious traditions. The FGS Buddhist Order has the largest number of female monastics of any Buddhist order today. By providing and supporting educational and leadership opportunities, he has worked to improve the status of women in Taiwan. He has held full ordination ceremonies for women of the Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana traditions. In addition, Master Hsing Yun annually organizes conferences to bring together the various Buddhist schools and to promote dialogues between Buddhists and other major religious groups.

Throughout his lifetime of propagating Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has indeed contributed tremendously to the systematization, modernization, humanization, engagement and internationalization of Buddhism development. He has indeed made tremendous contributions to Buddhism, in regulating its practice and propagating its teachings, in making it relevant to modern day society and applicable to daily life, and in spreading its teachings worldwide!

Grand Master Hsin Yun is truly a grand Buddhist master with grand merits and great wisdom. His great vows and wide activities are akin to the liberating works of Buddha Amitabha, and many Buddhists actually considered him as a reincarnation or manifestation of a great Bodhisattva! It was truly our merits and fortune to be able to follow his footsteps in walking the Path of Enlightenment. We are so fortunate to dedicate our lives to the propagation and attainment of the Buddhadharma, and we truly owe Master Hsin Yun a lot in this! Dear Master Hsin Yun - Thank you for being such an inspirational and dedicated Buddhist master and leader!

Even until today, Master Hsin Yun is unstoppable in

continuing his Dharma activities worldwide. He never care about his own benefits and welfare, but giving himself 100% to the meaningful works of saving and liberating sentient beings. His fearless and compassionate leadership continues to inspire and motivate all of us, and his diligent and modern way of spreading the Buddha perfects Modern Buddhism in almost every aspect and levels.

FGS's collective charismatic leadership is truly the greatest beacon of hope for Mahayana Buddhist in this 21st century. With over two thousand disciples from around the world and over a million devotees around the world, Venerable Master has spread the teachings far and wide. His Dharma heirs, numbering more than a hundred, come from various parts all over the world. His teaching style is simple yet practical, holistic but yet multidimensional. He points us to the ancient wisdom of Ultimate Truth – the One Yana of Buddhadharma, and yet his tools and methods are so modern, simple, practical and effectively functional.

I bow to his two lotus feet, and I sincerely pray for his long life and good health. I am so thankful to be able to learn and practice the Dharma under his compassionate

guidance and supports, and I pray that we could always be his humble and loyal disciples, lives after lives! Under his tremendous blessings and wise leadership, may FGS continues to become the best refuge place for all sentient beings; May the world be healed by the wondrous medicine of the Dharma, and may the *Bodhi* seeds of Enlightenment be spread far and wide to every part of the world.

Q: Although you were inclined in walking the path of self-realization e.g. doing solitary retreats and meditation practices, but we noticed that Master Hsin Yun has been quite affirmative and supportive towards your style of practicing the Dharma...

A: Yes, and I am deeply grateful for that as well. I have shown my accountability to my own disciples by telling them, “Hey, look here! I am not as rebellious as you thought – and I did go back to FGS to make my confessions to Master Hsin Yun (for leaving FGS in early days...)” – otherwise they will claim that “*You see, we have a very rebellious Buddhist master!*”

Back to my early days, as I mentioned, I had received the transmission of Zen lineage, the practice of Silent

Illumination method of Chaodong school (Soto Zen, 曹洞宗) from Ven. Renhai. I had faith in my meditation practice, and decided to deepen it day by day. So I asked to leave FGS for good, so I was not actually a rebel who ran away without any rational reasons.

After taking leave from FGS, many causes and conditions had changed, and I couldn't go back as I planned. So I decided to deepen my Zen practice and at the same time to propagate the Dharma in accordance to contemporary conditions. I never stop doing retreats and meditation, and I've also tried my best in contributing to the Buddhist community in specific and to the world peace in general.

So I went back to FGS to reconnect with Master Hsin Yun, and he also accepted my confession and apology kindly and unconditionally. I merely want to express my gratefulness and gratitude to my kind guru, and to take this opportunity to confess and correct any misdeeds that I might have made along the way – nothing more and nothing less. I also made a brief report to Master Hsin Yun about my Dharma activities and some visionary projects.



Strong Mind, Zen Mind – A determined Hsin Tao during one of his fasting retreat.

3rd Dialogue

A Dharma Vocation emerging from Zen Cultivation

My vows and My Meditation

Q: Shifu, how do you then establish the gradual stages of Peaceful Zen (Peace Meditation), as well as your propagation of Dharma?

A: You must make a strong vow to begin with! I want to

attain the essence of Dharma – this was my first intention and motivation. Since I wanted to attain enlightenment so much, I tried my best to look for the best and quickest methods to do so. And you could only attain enlightenment by diligently practicing these methods – so I decided to engage myself in strong, intense and vigorous practices. I did my practices regularly and diligently, and as you know, I’ve had many great obstacles. But one of the greatest challenges has been our patience – it takes time to attain any worldly or spiritual goals. As a true practitioner, you must make a vow and tell your self – “I CAN DO IT!” and then accumulate your wisdom and merits with tremendous patience, diligence and gradual progress.

Q: To have a great vow that I must attain enlightenment from the very beginning?

A: Yes, I vow to attain enlightenment in this lifetime since I was 15 or 16 years old. Even today, I am still working hard on this very important direction!

Q: As an offering to the Buddha, you had yourself tattooed with the vows - “*May I awaken in gratitude*

for the kindness of Guanyin,” “I will never rest until Buddhahood is attained,” and “Liberating all beings by living in Suchness.” – These are very profound Dharma words, how could you even understand them when you were only a teenager at that time?

A: I think you can say that I was a bit talented in understanding the Dharma? Yes, I was naturally inspired and felt passionate in doing these things since I was very young. You can say that this was indeed my karmic connection. This was how I began my journey of searching, learning and realizing the Dharma.

Q: How could one practice the Dharma according to the gradual stages outlined by you (e.g. 1) Agama Stage; 2) Prajna stage 3) Dharma-Pundarika Stage and 4) Avatamsaka Stage) ?

A: We are here to learn and actualize the perfect wisdom of the Buddha, and we tend to follow the egoistic way of mundane thinking and worldly behavior. So we need a basic guideline to guide our minds and behavior. After much internalization and integration, I begin to categorize the Path to Enlightenment into Four Stages of Learning (as mentioned above). You can be assured

that you could attain complete enlightenment if you follow this guideline thoroughly and mindfully.

Let me give you some glimpses into these four stages:

- 1) **Agama stage** - training new students in the basics of Buddhism and monastic life, and how to become a dharma-vessel. It is akin to my hard training and strict retreats in my early days.
- 2) **Prajna stage** - training in the essential teachings and how to apply them to everyday life. You have to apply what I called “Wisdom Marketing System” in order to propagate this Integrated View between Dharma and Daily Life.
- 3) **Dharma-pundarika stage** - training in the Bodhisattva path and its relation to Dharma propagation and benefitting all sentient beings. This involves our great vows and auspicious connection with various kinds of sentient being. Your vows are actually your services and dedications to the entire world. In short, we should vow to *establish auspicious connection and meaningful affinity with others*.

4) **Avatamsaka stage** - maturing one's overall vision of the world

Q: But how do we *establish auspicious connection and meaningful affinity with others*?

A: You have to do it with a selfless attitude, and you must try your best in letting go of your dualistic mind. If you are a great Bodhisattva, every market place is your sacred space of practicing the holy Dharma. Treat and help all beings equally and compassionately, without any discrimination or biased views.

All human beings, regardless of their creed, color, religion or cultural background – are our brothers and sisters; all conditions good or bad are our stepping stones toward perfect Awakening. If you have *Prajna* (Wisdom) as your meditative tool, you will know that all people and conditions can co-exist harmoniously and beautifully, and we must depend on each other to strive in this world. Living in an interdependent world like this, we should try our best to eliminate all conflicts and misunderstandings, and to use our wisdom and compassion as our new inter-personal skills in dealing with each other. If you have wisdom and

compassion, you can flourish wherever you go. We can co-create a sacred space for oneself and others right here right now.

So my vows of helping and benefiting others come from my *Prajna* (Wisdom) – and the power of my *Prajna* has to be actualized in my day-to-day living. When I decided to make a great vow for myself and others, a creative concept came into my mind – I wanted to build a Museum – a unique museum dedicated to all major religions in the world.

So we began to plan for the establishment of the Museum of World Religions (MWR). This is a very big project, almost an impossible dream to be realized. I was a poor monk without any money or financial backups. I am just a meditating monk who came out from a graveyard retreat hut. I didn't know any big sponsors or generous tycoons. I simply had a vow that I wanted to make this dream happen. They said when you want something really badly, the whole universe conspires in helping you to achieve it – I find these wisdom words are true!

Museum of World Religions

- A Big Dream of a Poor Monk

Q: So what's the relationship between your vows and your faith?

A: Our vows are our goals e.g. what we want to achieve, and our faith is our conviction that we have while executing all our projects and activities. When you want to implement your vows, you would probably receive much contradictory information and you really don't know how to start or where to begin. But you keep doing and keep moving forward – this is the power of Faith. When I've decided that I wanted to do something, I will keep trying until I achieve it. I never quit. I never give up. Whatever obstacles in the way, I will move forward confidently and fearlessly. Focus on your goals and keep moving forward – this is my success secret!

Q: I heard that someone criticized you and your projects before, are you affected by these rumors or slanders?

A: When we started our project in establishing MWR (Museum of World Religions), we also established a Dharma Protection Society (護法會). We were so busy in engaging in all sorts of planning and meetings. We had to organize so many Dharma talks and events, and we had met many different kinds of obstructions and defamations. But we accepted everything and took them as challenges. We just kept moving forward – fearlessly and confidently.

I remember at that time, a high court judge by the sir name of Zhang came to visit us and he presented us with some bottles of so-called “Earth Dragon Wine” (Clay-dragon Eel Medicated Wine, 土龍泡酒) – with the fact that he didn’t know how to handle them as he was not a wine lover. He asked me to handle these wines in a *Dharmic* way, so I arranged our monks and nuns to recite some Sutras and dedicated merits to these snakes. This incident was misquoted and published as head line news in some local newspapers and magazines, and a famous professor even published his harsh comments on me about this fake news.

Q: Did Shifu go and explain about the whole issue with that particular professor?

A: I think it's OK that this had happened; I treat it as a playful manifestation of my life, a process that I need to go through. I am glad we went through it. This was not really a set-back, but just a small test along the way. I don't judge it as good or bad – it is merely a process of learning and improving oneself.

Before MWR was established, many people thought we would fail, and MWR couldn't be officially opened to meet the dateline. When MWR was officially opened, some of them thought that it won't last long – we had all sorts of reactions and criticisms. But we keep our heads high and did it anyway.

The Official Opening Ceremony of MWR coincided with the September 11 attack, a very sad and horrifying incident that had opened our eyes; and since then, people changed their views on MWR, and started to think that MWR has a timely mission of fostering greater understanding, respect, and tolerance for all the world's religions. They began to accept and embrace our visionary goals and missions.

Life is a flux and never a monotonous, flat and boring manifestation. Life is wonderful and beautiful in its

multidimensionality and pluralistic events. So just do your best and let go the rest – this is always my philosophy of life!

Q: So Shifu you are quite confident about yourself?

A: My confidence comes from my practice of loving kindness and compassion. My faith and belief come from my compassionate practice. Love and Compassion is the common entity that connects all sentient beings and all things.

Q: You had a very early experience about this “Common entity of All Lives”?

A: Yes, it is the Power of Zen Meditation, the Primordial Force of attainment and realization of the Dharma.

Q: Realization or attainment – can common people even know what it is?

A: I started my journey of Dharma by believing in the power of Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) Bodhisattva, then I shifted my focus into the original teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni – which is the proper training I received as a Buddhist monk, and I studied, learned and practiced whatever I'd received gradually and

systematically. One step at a time, you will get there if you have patience and confidence.

Q: So when you couldn't generate faith and confidence in your mind, the remedy is 'just do it'?

A: You need a good and qualified teacher to begin with. After receiving some basic instructions on how to meditate, then you can put that into practice. First of all, you need some good understanding on the Dharma, so get yourself familiarized with the theoretical aspects of the teachings, and then you start to practice and actualize the theories that you've learned, from there your faith and confidence will grow by and by. But no matter what, you need to have a good and qualified Dharma guide, a Buddhist teacher to begin with.

Q: So in order to practice the Dharma, one must have a good and qualified guru – is that what you meant?

A: Yes, this is a very basic requirement. When you practice the Dharma, you can organize your thoughts and experiences along the way, but you must remember: a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single little step – you must practically *do it* before

you could taste the sweetness of the Dharma. You must internalize all your learning and transform them into your own personal experiences. Do this gradually and systematically before you reach the transcendence that you seek for. Enlightenment and awakening will come naturally and effortlessly – after you've put in all your hard efforts, patience and 100% commitment.

Q: But how do we know if we've met a qualified guru?

A: When you truly know the direction of your Dharma practice, you will definitely meet with a good and qualified teacher, or in many cases, many great Dharma guides. So first of all, decide your desired goal – your specific destination, and then wait or look for a good Dharma guide; and then you travel the journey of Dharma in accordance to his or her instructions and advices. You will safely reach your destination if you follow the guide's advices and instructions mindfully and meticulously. Always prepare yourself well, remember this:

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear!

Q: Shifu, do you think you have had a great teacher to guide you? And then you have absolute faith in him and

his transmission of Dharma?

A: Yes, take your teacher or guru as a guide, but most importantly, you must generate some faith in the *Buddhadharma*. When you have this kind of immovable faith (of Dharma) you will naturally practice the Dharma diligently. And when you practice the Dharma with faith, your Dharma practice becomes very powerful and effective.

Q: Shifu, you have been practicing meditation for quite some years, but why did you change your mind and get involved in many Dharma activities such as Dharma propagation and establishing the MWR? How did you begin all these?

A: I think I had reached to a point in my life that I could tell myself, “Look, now the time has come! The karmic affinity has ripened and auspicious connections had been built – so now, let’s do something different together!”

I wanted to start a Buddhist Institute in the beginning, we tried it but nobody came. So we needed some break through, and I didn’t want to repeat whatever other people had done. So then I made a vow to start the

MWR – and it had created tremendous responses – good and bad, supports and disagreements. I noticed many religious believers were quite confused about their own spiritual path, they really need some guidance and advice. Some even became crazy or committed suicide because of their confusions and misunderstanding, and the whole world at that time was truly overwhelmed by global social issues and religious terrorism – so I gave my best, hence the establishment of the MWR.

Learning Together is Fun if We know We are Connected to Each Other

Due to the ripening of various conducive causes and conditions, we had successfully created a religious platform of mutual-understanding and dialogue, a cross-religious approach of learning from each other, and a Universal Sacred Space that welcomes and embraces all major spiritual paths in the world. We aim to preserve and propagate the quintessential teachings of all

wisdom traditions through some precious collections and exhibition of their precious texts, relics, arts and artifacts. We encourage people to understand and practice their own faith through a proper channel such as this one, and we can definitely do it in a very open-minded way in a very universal sacred space such as the MWR.

We planned along while we were looking for our financial resources. We were searching for our direction while we were waiting for some supportive conditions to arrive. We had encountered many non-believers at the beginning, and some of them came from different religious backgrounds. These were our main sponsors and supporters; most of the Buddhists didn't support or couldn't understand what we were doing. MWR carried the name of 'World Religions' and not 'Buddhism' – so most Buddhist were not so supportive. Nevertheless, I never gave up and looking back from now, I am glad that I did it my way!

I just came out from my retreat at that time, and didn't have much supports from my students, but due to some unique connections, I managed to realize the dream of MWR.

It all began with one simple idea, “How could we make this MWR a success?” – we went to visit many sacred places and museums, we asked questions and collected feedbacks; “Learn by doing ; deliver quick wins” was truly our mantra at that time. Now we have gathered some like-minded leaders and scholars to do this together, and I am quite happy with our accomplishment so-far. MWR has been the subject of considerable international acclaim, and I am quite proud to call myself its founder.

How we started to build MWR? We visited many scholars and experts on the subject matters. First we went to Japan and visited a Japanese Shrine Museum. They supported us by sharing their ideas and concepts, and they’ve helped us in designing MWR’s main content and projects. This was our first stop.

After the Japan trip, we visited many established museums in Russia, England and the US. The Federation of Russia was just established, and they had gathered many precious religious artifacts in order to build a Historical Museum. I heard they had done it quite well, and the museum is very beautiful and elegant.

During our trip in Russian museum, I met with some Russian scientist who wore lay Buddhist robes and I was pondering: where did these people come from? They were some very serious lay Dharma practitioners, and they had been studying the connection of Science and Buddhism since their early days (during the cold war period when Soviet Union was competing with the US in terms of space technology). They were retired Buddhist scientists, who had studied deeply the connection of Buddhist Cosmology and Modern Science. They abandoned Orthodox Judaism and embrace Buddhism.

We need a lot of money to build a museum. When we visited the British Museum, we were awed by those rare and precious artifacts and collections – how could we also gather a fund of at least a dozen billions to build a good museum with the equivalent standard and prestige? We really didn't know what to do or how to continue.

And then we came to Mainland China and visited their museums. In Song Hua River Museum (松花江博物館), we saw they exhibited some fishes and they just displayed about twenty aquariums – all with fishes and nothing else! I told myself, if these people could do it

and called it a ‘museum’ – so can I!

And then we also visited the Museum of Tolerance and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and we told ourselves, “Yes! These are our models – we want to build MWR according to their styles and concepts. We wanted to build a sacred space of religious harmony and spiritual unity, not to compete with others in terms of the size of the building or its artifact collections. I began to form my basic ideas of how we should proceed with the MWR project.

I was contemplating on a few issues at that time. We were promoting cross-religious studies and mutual respects among all major religions; but if we couldn’t express our views correctly, it would back-fire on us. And we have to prevent religious fanaticism at all cost, so we got to be very careful in executing our plans and ideas. We decided to visit each and every religious leader and humbly asked for their feedbacks, advices and supports. We asked them: “If we would to build a Museum of World Religions, what would you expect to come out of it? Do you agree or embrace this noble cause? Are you willing to help and support us?” We asked this simple question all around the world, and

strange enough, nobody express any objection to us. They all agreed on one thing – we, the world, need such kind of museum very much!

So we did it and we made it happened. I've learned a lot from these touching stories and unique encounters, this is how we accumulate our experiences in having meaningful dialogues and productive communions.

For example, a representative from the Orthodox Judaism once told us, "It is so disrespectful that you've display our holy objects in your museum!" and I responded with a smile and said, "Well, MWR is actually a holy shrine, a sacred place for all religious people and it was built for all religious traditions!"

And I also began my Buddhist- Muslim Dialogue quite early. The first Muslim leader whom I met was from the Turkish reformist group. We had great conversations and he invited me to give a talk at their high school. The topic of my talk that day was "Five Precepts and Ten Virtues in Buddhism". After finish listening to my talk, he told me, "Ah! Your teachings are quite similar to ours!" From then on we had become good friends. They were famous for their warmth and hospitality, they like

to invite you to taste their local food and would be very pleased if your stomach is totally full and bloated!

Breaking all barriers of Communication – the Mission of MWR

So we have been continuing and expanding our auspicious connection with these religious leaders until today.

I became good friends with so many religious leaders and workers. Although we have some language barriers, but some feelings and affinity are beyond words and languages. We all smile in the same language – and a warmth heart is the universal language of kindness, love and care. If we are sincere and kind-hearted, we can make friends with almost everyone. By and by, I become more and more confident in my approach of propagating World Peace and Religious Harmony.

MWR Preparatory Office was officially set-up in August of 1993. We had an open tender on September

1996 and an English company won the bidding. Unfortunately due to various reasons, we discontinued our contract with this company and we hired Ralph Apoelbaum Associates (RAA) as our main designer. The founder of RAA Mr. Ralph Appelbaum was also the designer of the Museum of Tolerance and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). He was a Jewish and I considered him as our most ideal designer. We had been good friends since then and we shared a lot of interesting and meaningful memories.

In the beginning stage, Mr. Ralph asked me, “what kind of Museum would you want to build – a first, second or third class museum?” I had no money at that time, and I was quite sad upon hearing this question. I pondered for a while and said to him firmly, “Let’s build a 1st class Museum of World Religions!”

Q: Shifu! You truly had a very great vow and great determination, how could you continue it? How do you remain committed to your vow?

A: I wanted to build a museum with tremendous quality, and this would be my best legacy to all future generations.

I had many discussions regarding our concepts with RAA team. Our ideas and concepts are mainly derived from:

- The Universal Global Spirit of Unity and Oneness, inspired by the works of the 4th Zen Patriarch, Daoxin (四祖道信): “*The 100,000 Dharma doors all return to the heart.*” (百千法門、同歸方寸).
- The teachings from the Universal Chapter of the Lotus Sutra; e.g. the manifestations of Guanyin Bodhisattva in saving and liberating sentient beings;
- Fifty-three Visits of Sudhana in the Avatamsaka Sutra (《華嚴經》善財童子五十三參).

I wanted this museum to exhibit and manifest the unique qualities and spiritual essence of various religions, at the same time some common universal values could also be shared and embraced. We need to co-create a mutual-loving society and a more peaceful world with respect, tolerance, love and mutual-understanding. It is akin to the Fifty-three Visits of Sudhana in the Avatamsaka Sutra – he visited all kinds of people but he managed to learn something valuable from each and every one of them. When you have an open mind and a

loving heart, everything in this universe can be your precious teacher. I myself had been practicing this “open-minded enquiring” while I was visiting and asking questions to various religious leaders and experts from all over the world.

We had no money and no experience, but it reminded me about some wisdom words of Rev. Michael Bernard Beckwith :-

You can start with nothing. And out of nothing, and out of no way, a way will be made.

We had to organize some Buddhist ceremonies to get some financial funding, so we learned how to perform the Water-land Ceremony (Shuilu, 水陸法會) from Ven. Mingcheng (明乘長老). From then on, this important ceremony had become the main self-sustainable source of income for our Sangha, and we also turned it into a multi-functional platform of education and Dharma propagation later on.

MWR's Honorary Curator - The Taiwanese architect and

educator Han Pao-the

Q: We now know that it was very difficult in your process of preparation to establish the MWR, but what happened after the establishment?

A: The real issues of management arrived after MWR was officially opened, we need a qualified curator, so we thought of Mr. Han Pao-the.

When I first met Mr. Han and requested his help, he said, "This is a mission impossible! You won't be successful in doing this!" In his opinion, the most difficult part would be the conceptual ideas. "To build and maintain a museum is a very unpopular and unproductive idea, you will exhaust all your financial back-ups and you won't have any money to maintain it at the end!" he told me. He knew very well that I was just a very poor monk.

But I told me, "I don't want it to be as big as the British Museum, I just want a sacred space that could give us hope, love and spiritual wisdom!"

Q: So did you think Mr. Han understood your ideas and

concepts?

A: He asked me many practical questions in the beginning. He envisioned some difficulties in the future, so he didn't quite agree with me in the preliminary stage. But by and by, we interacted with each other more and more and he fully understood my ideas and concepts. He became our curator for seven terms, and I had also appointed him as our Hardware Master Planner after his retirement. He continued to become MWR's honorary life-time curator until he passed away in winter 2015, during the 14th Anniversary of MWR.

I missed him and his frank advices a lot. He would advice me on anything as long as it could improve the quality of MWR. He used to tell me that there were three stages of his life: the first two stages were about aesthetic and scientific education, and the third stage was about **Life Education** – which was his vocation in MWR. He had a masterpiece in every stages of his life, and MWR was his masterpiece in his later stage of life...

During the 10th Anniversary of MWR, a reporter asked

Mr. Han, “Many people from overseas would like to ‘duplicate’ MWR – what do you think?” Mr. Han answered “It’s impossible! MWR couldn’t be duplicated in anyway – it’s a creation of hundreds of thousand people – it can only be preserved and inherited but couldn’t be replicated.”

I had many memorable experiences with Mr. Han, some sweet some bitter, but nevertheless, I’ll always remember him as a good friend and a great curator.

Due to his public service duties, Mr. Han rejected my invitation to become our 1st curator for MWR. So we had no curator even we were ready to start the museum. After many painful and difficult experiences, still, I went back to him and offer him the same position again. He accepted gracefully this time, and became our first curator during our 2nd Anniversary. His friends and relatives were against his decision, but he insisted this time that he had made the right decision.

We didn’t have much financial income at that time, so I was quite grateful for his generous support, but he told me, “As an intelligentsia of modern Taiwan, I was quite regretful that I couldn’t agree with you to work together

with the RAA team in establishing the MWR - you guys had been misunderstood by many and the journey was not that easy at all – I regret that I couldn't help you in the beginning!"

So our cooperation began from our precious friendship – a mutual understanding that was beyond words and explanations. Meaningful co-creations always begins with friendships and mutual-understanding.

Mr. Han had created many milestones for MWR. Since he became our curator, he had organized many important and breath-taking exhibitions in MWR. His visions and creativity was truly MWR's treasures. Even after his retirement, he continued his works in propagating ideas and concepts of MWR through his writing and talks. He regarded 'Life Education' as his mission of life, and his works are now continued in various levels in primary and secondary schools all over in Taiwan.

Mr. Han knew my views and visions, he once said, "I can let go of my position as the curator, but I will continue to preserve and protect the spiritual lineage of MWR!" I miss him so much nowadays. Mr. Han was truly an

embodiment of MWR's energy and love. He knew very well that I wanted to extend this loving energy of MWR into the actualization of a University for Life and Peace – now the Vision of the University has been established, but Mr. Han is no more with us to witness this preliminary success. We will miss him now and forever more, as one of best model of love, peace and integrity.

The work of Love and Peace

Q: Shifu, your preparation in establishing the MWR was almost like a social movement, but how did you pass down your legacy?

A: We are continuing our work in promoting the service of Love and Peace – in Taiwan as well in many countries all over the world. We are creating some good awareness internationally, but it's still a very preliminary job. We are still looking for more international recognition and practical supports. Our job is to promote the concept of “*Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence*” – our purpose is to build a harmonious, multifaceted and mutually cooperative global family of Love and Peace.

So we need to build a school, an institute to attract and train our workers of Love and Peace – we will also bring love and peace to the unfortunate ones through our charity programs and medical services; we will spread love and peace to rural areas where medical aids and humanitarian help are most needed.

Mr. Han had been instrumental in extending our ‘Life Education’ concept into some practical platforms, from which outdoor observation tours and studies from primary and secondary schools could be held. This will become an integral part of our University programs.

In my opinion, MWR is the connecting dots and base camp of the University of Love and Peace. The whole world is our family, and let’s builds a global family of love and peace together!

We don’t need a big place for this university, but a suitable land like Ling Jiou Mountain or our Peace Project Land in Naungmon (Myanmar) will do.

Q: So what are the basic contents of MWR in terms of Life Education?

A: We had massive discussions about this topic during

our preparation of establishing MWR, we came out with something like this:

“Respect, Tolerance, Universal Brotherhood, Love and Peace”. The Museum of World Religions is based on the spirit of the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism —“Respect all beliefs, embrace all peoples, cherish every life.” Unconditional Love is our common Truth, and Peace is our constant wish - Our mission and vision is to co-create a global family of love, peace and harmony.

“Respect all beliefs, embrace all peoples, cherish every life” is our main motto. You can see that there’s separation, misunderstanding and confrontations everywhere. Even among the same religion we have to have different sects and schools of thought. In order to bring balance and harmony back to each and every ecosystem, we need mutual-respect to achieve it. As I mentioned before, ***“Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence”*** is our goal and vision. We need to bring in the spirit of mutual-respect into religious dialogues and spiritual co-existence. There’s one common belief for all religions – we all believe in the power of LOVE – unconditional, authentic and

boundless Love. We need to bring Love back to our religions, and make our Spiritual Traditions great again. Standing together with the power and blessings of Love, we respect, embrace and learn from all major religions. Now we need to build a University of Life and Peace to make this vision a possible dream.

Universal Brotherhood/Sisterhood means a harmonious togetherness without any conflicts and confrontations. We vow to transform all hostility into hospitality in promoting a holistic lifestyle of “***Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence***”. We need to promote a movement of “Loving our Mother Earth and Embracing Universal Peace”. This is a holistic concept that includes all dimensions of Life e.g. environmental protection, life education, meditation workshops etc. It’s a very doable and practical lifestyle movement, not merely some wonderful Ethiopic ideas.

How do we attain and maintain a healthy eco-system of harmonious co-existence and holistic sustainability? Our physical body is consisting of six elements: earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness. You are healthy if your six elements are in balance – and you become sick if they are in messy and chaotic

conditions. All composite phenomena in this world are NOT independent, we are all interdependent living beings. We depend on each other to stay healthy, happy, free and strong. Similarly, the well-being of our mother earth also depends on every living thing that lives on it. Our mother earth is a living organism; she is a life system that depends on our co-existential well-being and harmony. How to protect, preserve and revitalize the mother earth? This would be our main missions and direction.

We need a Life University to study and promote this. We need to protect our mother earth from being polluted and harmed by wars, political invasions, consumerism and materialism. We should promote a healthy and holistic lifestyle of simplicity and spiritual abundance. Like what Mahatma Gandhi said, “Live simply so others may simply live” – this could well be our slogan as well. We need to strive smartly and diligently for our own survival as a species of human race.



Dwelling in Serenity and Clarity – Hsin Tao doing his daily practice in the Ksitigarbha Hall, Ling Jiou Mountain.

4th Dialogue

Learning the Big Lessons on Life

Myanmar as the Cultural Center of Buddhism

Q: So the *University for Life and Peace* will be built in Myanmar?

A: Yes. Because there are at least 130 different races in Myanmar, and many conflicts and confrontations are happening here and there. We need to install peace and harmony in this region. Relatively, this country needs

peace more than any place in the world, and globally speaking, we hope to receive some international attention and supports from everyone. From now onwards, I will dedicate my whole life into this meaningful project, which is also an extension of our MWR's vision and missions. I want to bring a refiner and more practical form of Life and Peace Education into this area. With this area as our base camp, we can then co-create a global family of harmonious co-existence all around the world. We have only one Mother Earth – we need to think and act together in loving and protecting her. This is something that I am focusing on at this moment.

Q: I heard that there were some Buddhist-Muslim confrontations in this country as well?

A: Mainly because the Myanmar government was incapable in handling this complicated issue. There were more than 1.5 million refugees in Myanmar. The western countries took in 20 thousands refugees; even this amount has been creating problems in their own countries, needless to say 1.5 million people? Some of the refugees demand independence from the government – so this is another problem. The western

media likes to portray this as Buddhist-Muslim conflicts but I don't think so. It is purely a problem of mismanagement and ineffective leaderships.

Q: Why would Shifu want to set-up this University in Myanmar?

A: The most important treasure of this country is her legacy of Buddhist culture – a Dharma lineage that has been continued and preserved for many centuries. This is the original teachings of the Buddha, the pure and unpolluted Theravadin tradition. Theravadin Buddhism in Thailand and Sri Lanka had been polluted or changed, but this degeneration never happened in Myanmar. You can still see, feel or taste the original atmosphere of Buddhist teachings in this beautiful land. So we must protect, preserve and enhance this Buddhist culture.

This country is undergoing some tremendous changes at the moment. It is gradually opening itself to the world, in a very slow and steady pace. It hasn't built a strong connection with the international world yet, so it has great opportunities to preserve its own culture before it is ready to open widely to the outside world.

We can learn a lot from Myanmar's traditional culture, but we must also respect their uniqueness and help them to strengthen their spiritual bonds with their own cultures. We need to create a very open-minded, interactive but yet integrative relationship with Myanmar people. This 'satellite' kind of mutual connection must be maintained and enhanced. The whole 'Myanmar identity' will be destroyed if they consciously or unconsciously dilute their own cultures or traditional values, or forget to enhance their own uniqueness and traditional identities.

Q: Wao, that sounds important...

A: The true value of Buddhism lies within the holistic recognition of each and every phenomena. The Dharma teaches us to know ourselves and to respect others. When you know how to respect lives and to embrace our differences – you are practicing real Buddhism. As I mentioned before, we need to co-create a holistic lifestyle of ***“Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence”***

Q: In short, if we could bring peace and harmony to Myanmar, then the whole environment and community

of Global Buddhism would be benefited as well?

A: Yes. Myanmar is actually the heartland of Modern Buddhism. It is a great place for us to learn about Theravada or Original Buddhism, which is a holistic and integrated set of teachings of perfect awakening. It is the life-force of all other forms of Buddhism, which might have been degenerated or polluted by many other inner and outer elements. Myanmar Buddhism remains as a very pure and simple tradition of Buddhist philosophy and meditation practices. This purity and originality of the Dharma must be treasured, preserved and enhanced. We must be clear about this.

Q: Has it become a very heavy burden for all?

A: Myanmar is a Buddhist country, although it has some political and corruption issues, but basically, their military regime is quite supportive toward the development of Buddhism. Their Buddhist culture is quite pure and unpolluted. Their leaders, political or social, are all devotees. They are very respectful toward the Sangha, even a prime minister has to humbly bow and make offerings to a Buddhist monk in

Myanmar. This is a very respectful and holy tradition. This tradition teaches and encourages us to respect the Triple Gems – the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Some people especially some western medias might say that everyone is equal in this modern world, so why should we bow to the Buddha or monks? In reality, the Enlightened Ones and his humble followers (the Sangha) don't need our respect – it is us who need to train our minds by making prostrations, offerings and other types of Buddhist practices. By bowing down with our physical body, we are actually taming and purifying our body, speech and mind. We are striving to purify our egoistic attitude of pride, stinginess, jealousy and ego-grasping. When we become humble and respectful, harmonious interactions with others will begin to flourish.

Of course, some collusion between the government and tycoons in the commercial (business) sectors are quite common here, especially among the local Chinese community. This has created many complicated social problems, including some conflicts between the minorities and the local people.

Integrating the Dharma with our Daily Life

Q: I can see that we need tremendous courage and skilful means in healing and helping this society, and it doesn't look hopeful at the current moment...

A: We must be optimistic about the future. Simply because the teachings of *Buddhadharma* has been deeply ingrained in Myanmar people's mind and lifestyles. Buddhism is deeply rooted here, and they are living a religious life of simplicity and austerity. They keep their five precepts (not killing, not stealing, not lying, no sexual misconducts and no intoxicants) strictly and diligently – so this is the very basis of a stable, peaceful and loving society. As long as we could prevent this simple society from the harmful effects of globalization such as materialism, sex, gambling etc; we can then integrate Myanmar's traditional values with some positive aspects of western democratic system, so that a modern but yet spiritual land of Religious Purity can be created in a near future.

Q: Just like Christianity in western countries, the *Buddhadharma* had become an integral part of Myanmar people's daily life – is this true?

A: Yes. Mainly because the spiritual values and harmonious power of the Five Precepts have been practiced and actualized in their day-to-day living. By upholding these Five Precepts, one can eliminate or even uproot the negative effects of our five poisonous emotions e.g. desire, hatred, ignorance, pride and doubts. The reduction and purification of these five negative emotions will then make space for us to create a more harmonious, kind, compassionate and loving society.

Children in Myanmar receive Buddhist education since they are born, and they follow their parents to local temples to prostrate to the Buddhas. Buddhist monks are their educators and community leaders. Ethical conducts and morality are very much emphasized in Myanmar society. Most of Myanmar people know how to differentiate between right and wrong, and they are living their simple life in accordance with the principles of Dharma e.g. the practice of virtuous deeds and the attainment of liberation.

Life Education is crucial here, if we can combine our traditional values of Buddhist cultures with the advancement of science and technology, I believe we could create a bright future for the Myanmar people in particular and to the world in general.

Q: An Integration between science and Buddhism?

A: As we all know, the philosophical and psychological teachings within Buddhism share commonalities with modern scientific and philosophical thought – especially when you look at some meaningful dialogues between Buddhist leaders and modern scientists regarding various aspects of Quantum Physics. Many western scientists are turning to the teachings of the Buddha for answers and solutions, and this is a very inspiring trend in today's modern world.

So we had no problems in working and cooperating with scientific community. But when it comes to international politics, it is quite a different scenario. I am a bit worry that there are some 'cultural colonization' going on in Myanmar, as some western political power and religious groups are trying very hard in manipulating Myanmar's traditional values and

cultures recently.

If Myanmar society is polluted by western consumerism and greedy capitalism, I don't think this is a healthy phenomenon. I do agree that we should 'open-up' and learn something new and valuable from western liberalism and democratic system; however, we should also strive to protect and preserve some local traditional values. The imported elements from the Hollywood such as violence, sex, drugs etc which are harmful to the local community should be controlled and prohibited; western individualism and heroism are also not so helpful to maintain a harmonious and co-existential eastern society such as the one in Myanmar. We need to strike a balance between the east and the west, and the teaching of *Buddhadharma* is the best tool we could use for the integration and modernization of the Myanmar society.

Q: So having 'too much freedom' is the cause of degeneration and cultural downfalls?

A: Too much of anything is definitely damaging. One major weakness of humankind is to indulge oneself into all kinds of negative activities. Under the name of

'freedom', out of greed, attachments, hatred and ignorance, we human beings are doing all sorts of harmful behaviors to each other. Look at our newspapers nowadays, what kind of crazy and chaotic world are we living in? Scandals, traumas, tragedies, collusions, fake news etc. People even kill themselves just because they didn't get what they want in life. Our actions and behaviors are becoming more and more like animals. We are preoccupied and overwhelmed by personal interests and selfish motivations, we are lacking of mindfulness and awareness in leading a healthy, simple and loving life. At the end this would become a lose-lose tragedy instead of a win-win happy ending!

Q: You are saying by protecting our traditional values and cultures, we are actually protecting our lives and environment? How about the ideas and system of democracy and globalization?

A: Our globalized democratic system has reached to the point where we should reconsider its benefits and functionalities. To be a democratic nation, it doesn't mean we have to throw away all our traditional values and cultures, which will only cause a negative vicious

circle of moral downfalls and ethical crises. We need to protect good people from being harmed and manipulated by the corrupted leaders and politicians – that's the main purpose of a healthy democracy. The western world emphasizes a lot on 'human rights', but for an Asian country like Myanmar, the 'Path of Humanism' is much important and beneficial. If we do things and treat others with a humanitarian attitude of kindness and mutual-respect; and listening and following our Inner Moral Compass e.g. our conscience – we could definitely create a humanistic pure land on earth. Let's put oneself in other's shoes and do this together. Nationally and internationally, we can co-create a wonderful world full of joy, abundance and harmony.

The Convincing Power of Spirituality

Q: But what are the differences between 'human rights' and the 'Path of Humanism'?

A: The 'Path of Humanism' (the Human Way) means we are striving in creating a win-win society of peace,

love and abundance; we are co-creating a holistic lifestyle of “***Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence***” based on universal human values and humanitarian principles. ‘Human rights’ talks about ‘who’s right’ and ‘who’s wrong’, and this argument will attract many different kind of conflicts, disagreements and power struggles. So let’s focus more on the path of humanity instead of power struggles, at least for this point of time.

Q: So one system cares about outer competition, striving to protect one’s rights and interests, while the other one focuses on inner well-being, trying its best in helping and benefiting others?

A: The main agenda of the ‘Human Path’ is to benefit each other in a harmonious and co-existential way. Human right movements can sometimes become selfish, egoistic, aggressive and even confrontational.

Q: So if we do well in terms of ‘Human Path’, then we don’t need human rights anymore?

A: Back in old days, if you have a great king/emperor who was kind and humanistic, the whole country would be benefitted; but if he/she was cruel and violent, much

damage would be done. When you look at our current democratic system, many presidential elections are controlled by some interest groups as well, and populists are using their freedom of speech to create separations and misunderstandings. So are we getting better now? I am not so sure about this!

Q: So it remains as an unresolved problem?

A: All systems have their own limitations. Nothing is ultimate in this *samsaric* world. Only Life Education can improve and uplift our human society. We need a harmonious balance between Human Right Movement and the Human Path; and we also need some healthy competition between capitalism and communism as well. Communism focuses on collective welfare, whereas Capitalism emphasizes individual rights and freedom – we need to integrate these two to protect our individual interests as well as our collective well-being. We need to strike a balance between effective (collective) management and individual freedom.

Q: Are you saying that we can use the platform of religions as a bridge to connect these two?

A: Every religion talks about charity, compassion and

helping one another. The spiritual way is the Path of Human; its power is soft but yet convincing. When you become a spiritual person, you are able to liberate yourself from the shackles of materialism and consumerism. But at the same time, you could also use all materialistic tools as skilful means to achieve what you want and to help others. Materialistic life is lifeless mechanism – dry, boring and heartless. Spiritual life is a life of joy, freedom, peace and abundance. So which one do you want?

We are a spiritual being having a physical experience, NOT a physical being having a spiritual experience. As a spiritual being, it is important we could help and benefit each other. If we can't do it, at least we should try NOT to harm each other. This is the eternal principle of all major religious traditions. A spiritual society is a community of integrity and morality. Everyone can enjoy an abundant and fulfilling life in this sacred society.

Q: And Buddhism and science should work together to create a better world!

A: Exactly! I saw a joke that day:

“Relax! What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind!”

But in reality, what is the use of matter without the anticipation of mind? In science, we use different tools to understand and explore the outer world, when this reach to a certain peak, the scientist will come back in search of our inner spirituality – our true nature of mind. This is very interesting, don't you think so? You search and search outwardly, at the end, the conclusion will be “emptiness” – and this “emptiness” is nothing but the projection of our own deluded mind, isn't that interesting? Beyond this relative world is the ultimate realm of spirituality, and we need some religious wisdom to understand it. This is the function of our spirituality. To search for multidimensional truth and ultimate reality, you need to study and practice religions. A spiritual person – be it a scientist, psychologist, quantum physicist or a Buddhist monk – by being a more compassionate, empathetic and wiser human being, we can definitely make this world a better place to live in!

Building a base camp of

Love and Peace

Q: Will there be a special area in Naungmon dedicated for study and education?

A: We will build a University Park there. Since Myanmar is a multi-cultural and multi-racial Buddhist country, we must start from there. We must help Myanmar in eradicating some social problems such as drug addicts, poverty, violence etc. We will also help to give them good education and career training, and some agricultural reforms are badly needed as well. We want to improve their knowledge, skills and their world view. We want them to study global Buddhism.

Q: What is global Buddhism?

A: It is an overview and holistic study on various traditions of Buddhism in the world. The curriculum includes Theravadin, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions in different parts of the world. Buddhism is today a global religion, thanks to technology (especially printing, IT and the Internet), openness to education, and its missionary spirit. A very vital aspect of Global Buddhism is its dynamic presence and

meeting between Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, as the two are of course often closely interwoven, as they are an integral part of Global Buddhism. Of course, the phenomenal growth of Engaged Buddhism today is its great feature as well.

The globalization of Buddhism can be seen as an integration of these two major Buddhist traditions. Modernization brings Buddhism to a whole new level of change and challenges. As Buddhist individuals or groups undergo religious changes and challenges, planned and unplanned, they need sustainable and vigorous educational plans to sustain their presence and growth. A meaningful interaction arises through seeing differences and a desire to learn from them. This interaction is further healthily encouraged by their common vision of the future *Buddhadharma*.

In short, we need to ask ourselves: what kind of Buddhism do I need? What's the future of Buddhism? How to achieve world peace through our meditation and actions? What's our action plan? We need Life Education to answer these questions. So let's build a University for Life and Peace for Myanmar and the world.

So I want to build a base camp of love and peace. Myanmar Buddhism has a very strong foundation in terms of Buddha's original teachings, but it needs to open up more and more, to connect and interact with other races, religions and the international world as a whole. As mentioned before, we need to co-create a holistic lifestyle of ***"Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence"***

Q: Myanmar is truly a multi-racial country; they have countless different tribes and races, with totally diversified cultures and habits. If children from different races can study together in one classroom, that would be a wonderful start for religious tolerance and racial harmony!

A: There are many poor and uneducated children in Myanmar, and most of them are orphans, so we accept and give them our best system of spiritual education. We want them to grow up healthily and happily, to become seeds of spiritual harmony and world peace. We hope we can produce a new generation of useful human beings, and we want them to spread their love and wisdom all around the world when they grow up. This is my ultimate goal and ambition.

The Pursue of a Spiritual Life

Q: Such a noble and yet practical goal!

A: We will provide them with holistic education, including some religious studies and professional trainings. We need a lot of manpower, financial supports as well as other material resources. The problem with consumerism is that we have been using and exhausting our resources, we are fighting to gain the same limited resource and after winning some, we immediately waste them recklessly, without thinking that this can cause harms to our environment and our next generations. Many billionaires in this world still have a 'poverty mindset' deep within their consciousness, reluctant to be generous with their accumulated wealth or to make this world a better place for all.

According to the United Nation's report, developed countries spend trillions and billions dollar in creating more and more advanced weapon; as if they are all psyched up and get ready for the third world war!

Imagine what a wonderful world we could help to create, if only we are willing to spend a small percentage of this money to feed the poor and to help the needy? It must be truly a heaven on earth!

Q: If we could spend the money meaningfully and beneficially, how nice! We could use it for charity, education and social-welfare.

A: We need to change the mindset of our leaders and politicians. Life Education is the other way to go forward. A closed mindset is always self-protective, greedy and selfish. I will attack others first in order to protect myself and my possessions. But if we could transform our selfish attitude into something like, “I am here merely to serve and help – let’s work together and help each other!” – isn’t it better and more beneficial? No arms, no weapons. We probably don’t need any police or army. If we all become spiritually advanced and matured, the only thing we need is love, love, love!

Q: Shifu, you really have a great and wonderful vow!

A: Our lives are impermanent anyway, so why not spend it on doing something useful and beneficial? I want to

utilize all my entire life in this Life Education project, so that a spiritual solution for all human problems could be found and realized.

I admire the lifestyle of my Myanmar brothers and sisters – they live a very simple and self-contented life. They are happy with what they have, and they don't try to manipulate or sabotage others. As long as they have a job, as long as they have something to eat, they are happy and contented. A simple and contented lifestyle like this is a gift to our mother earth, and we can truly learn some lessons from them. It's quite possible to us to live a simpler life, in which you enjoy each activity, and you are *fully present* in everything (or most things) you do, where you are easily contented rather than rushing to finish things.

Instead of fighting and competing for our limited natural resources, which would only end up with more wars, disasters, pollutions, suppressions, depressions, corruptions, dis-eases and manipulations – why not change our thoughts and actions, so that we can all live in a beautiful world of peace, joy, grace and abundance?

As long as we could learn to treasure and love this

mother earth unconditionally, we won't create problems and chaos for oneself and others. There are many things we can do to help save the mother earth. Do it now before it's too late!

We are all connected. Farmer or finance minister, president or plumber, we share the same home — this single, living planet. It's the only home we have. And from my perspective it's in dire need of attention. We have to protect our planet and its people for the next generations. We will have to organize ongoing campaigns highlighting environmental issues connected to the earth, water, air, and climate change.

**We ONLY have one Earth —
so we better start taking
care of it!**

Q: So do you encourage everyone to live a lifestyle of purity and simplicity, as our gift of healing to this mother earth?

A: Clocks are ticking, and the only planet we have to live

on is changing right before our eyes. What are we going to do about it? We need to protect and preserve our natural resources; we need to stop all manipulations and misuses of resources. As mentioned before, we need to take care of environmental issues concerning our earth, water, air, and climate. If we take care of our environment and eco-system, crop production in various seasons will be ensured and we would have enough to use/eat for everyone. Recent research has shown that climate change is already beginning to have a negative impact on global crop production levels. This is a very serious matter that affects the survival of human race. Drought and extreme weather conditions had dramatically reduced production of key crops during the second half of the 20th century, and will likely pose an increasingly dramatic problem in the coming decades, according to some new researches.

Q: So what would happen to our mother earth? Will she fight back and bring us more natural disasters and problems?

A: Imagine what would happen to your body if I cut-off all your limbs and take out all your organs? You

become very sick, almost dying. When the mother earth becomes crippled and disabled, she has no choice but to express her symptoms of pains and diseases.

Q: Therefore we are now experiencing all kinds of natural disasters such as earthquake, floods, windstorms and thunderstorms?

A: When you have no love to your mother earth and treat her badly, she will have high fevers and diarrheas. We call them 'natural disasters' but we are the ones who caused them from the beginning...

Q: This is a very challenging issue....it takes time for people to realize its urgency, and it's definitely not easy to achieve a consensus as well...

A: So we had to begin with some small important steps. We had built the MWR, and since then we are constantly seeking support and consensus from the international community. Let's re-launch our projects of loving this beautiful mother earth. Let us build a global family of love, peace and harmonious co-existence. No wars, no greedy capitalism. Let us be the guardians of this beautiful planet and NOT her

destroyers!

Q: So we have to start from being a spiritual person?

A: Firstly, we need to uplift our collective spirituality, and then we need to learn to enjoy our 'spiritual abundance' instead of our 'financial achievements'. We will make Naungmon a core education centre of love and peace, and we will be also organizing and delivering some charities, medical services, social aids, agricultural reform programs etc to the local people. We will provide holistic education and professional training to the orphans as well. In short, I want this place to become a sanctuary of spiritual growth and religious harmony.

Our core education value is to bring peace, love and stillness into our hearts. I would like to encourage all religious leaders to stand with me in this meaningful project – let us work together in creating a global family of love, life and laughter!

Q: You are including other religions as well. What are their contributions so-far?

A: We have very close connections and interactions will

almost all major religious leaders in the world. We will be continuing our meaningful connections, dialogues and cooperation in many years to come.

Q: This scared place is truly amazing and wonderful! Will you expect it to attract many tourists as well?

A: Naungmon is not exactly a beautiful tourist spot at the moment. It was a limestone land and people used to make it an opium farm. We need to do some agricultural reforms to increase its crop production. We will try our best to create a sacred place that encourages togetherness, sharing and mutual-respect. Our core spiritual values are the backbones of all other reforms and projects.

Mother Earth were damaged collectively by human beings, so logically, we also need tremendous collective efforts in bringing her back to balance and harmony. I believe we can achieve anything if we could reach a basic consensus on what to do and how to do it. We have a base camp now, we can always go back there to re-vitalize and refresh our commitments and efforts. We need an excellent management team to supervise all projects and plans. We need all kinds of supports from

everyone. If you are interested to get involved, please feel free to contact our volunteers and community leaders.

All Imperfections are Perfectly Imperfect

Q: So Shifu, do you still have doubts about the meaning of life?

A: You can say that I don't have much worries or hang-ups. I just want everyone to be spiritually matured, strong and free. Our spiritual cultures need to be preserved, enhance and propagated in a very practical and sustainable way.

What are the purposes of our spiritual practices? Why should we engage in these spiritual activities? Buddhism is the teaching of wisdom and compassion, it teaches us how to awaken oneself and others; and it brings harmonious interactions and spontaneous togetherness between oneself and others.

In Zen we said, "small doubts, small enlightenments; big

doubts, big enlightenment; no doubts, no enlightenment!” Doubtlessness is Perfect Enlightenment, and having doubts itself ignites us on the journey of seeking such Perfect Enlightenment. By studying and practicing selfless love and unconditional services, one can reach to such state of Perfect Enlightenment. We are perfectly imperfect at the moment, but we can strive to manifest our inner primordial Perfections in all challenging circumstances. We can perfect all things with great love and great wisdom.

We need to learn to apply and exercise our inner Perfect Wisdom into every aspect of our lives, and to reach out so that we can awaken others into the path of Enlightenment as well. When doubts arise, we open our hearts and keep learning and practicing. By and by, when all doubts, confusions and ignorance are cleared, we will surely attain the Perfect Enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings.



One Dharma, One Mind – giving teaching to his Sangha at the Avatamsaka Oceanic Perfection Hall, Ling Jiou Mountain.

5th Dialogue

Back to our Original True Mind

Back to the source of Dharma Practice

Q: Any changes in your life after the establishment of the MWR?

A: When I am propagating the Dharma, I am preparing myself for meditation practices; when I am doing meditation practices, I am actually preparing myself to propagate the Dharma. My whole life is never

separated from Dharma propagation and Zen Meditation practices. Both of these two things are actually one and the same for me. Most importantly, I went back to Ling Jiou Mountain to do a major retreat at 2006.

Q: Why would you want to do a retreat again?

A: Retreat means creating a boundary between yourself and others. No communications, no conversations. You just need to do two things in a retreat: study the Sutras and do Zen meditation. The study of the Sutras is equivalent of the Prajna (Wisdom) of words, whereas Zen meditation is actually the Prajna of Contemplation. When you do contemplation, you can return to your True Self, and make yourself at ease and comfortable in all circumstances. You become carefree and at ease all the time, as it is exemplified through the Chinese name of Avalokitesvara – Guan Zizai (觀自在). You need time, space and patience to do this.

When I came out from my last retreat, I spent most of time interacting with disciples, friends and scholars. I didn't have much time for myself to do some serious

practices. I felt that I need to re-organize my Dharma activities for these twenty years. It's like acting in a show, after everything is done, you need to let go and go back to your Original Self.

Q: What's the difference between this retreat and the previous one?

A: The main purpose of my previous retreat was to re-organize some monastic management. We had been too busy in setting up and managing the MWR, and our Dharma activities of stabilizing the society and human minds had been too hectic and busy. We need to go back to re-charge our batteries.

As monks and nuns, if we kept busy chasing and doing mundane things without inner reflections and self-awareness, then we are not so much different from mundane people. This happened to all my disciples, lay or renounced Sangha. They had forgotten their Dharma practices, so I want everyone to come back – come back to the root of Dharma. 'Back to Monastic practices' was the main theme of that retreat. We want to bring back the *Conglin* (Temple system of Chinese Chan (Zen), 叢林) style of being and doing things.

the *Conglin style* of temple system need to be revived and revitalized; and we need to also refresh the principles and practice style of our lineage, as well as restructuring our management and leadership systems. So I felt that I need to go back to reorganize everything in Ling Jiou Mountain.

We came back to our source of practice and the root of Dharma, and we re-produced a new source of Dharma energy so that we could propagate the Dharma in a more creative and vigorous way. All my disciples – renounced Sangha or lay – were encouraged to come back to their inner Dharma practices as well. We were doing this retreat together, no matter who or where they were. Together as one team, we came back to our True Self, our Original Home of Dharma.

Q: So Shifu did the retreat with the purpose to educate your disciples?

A: Zen practice is a serious training between the master and his disciples. All technical transmissions happen between the master and his students, and it should be the passing down of *the power of experiential realization and special insights*. Only then the

master could liberate himself and all his disciples from the oceanic sufferings of this *samsaric* world.

I realized that I had been busy all these years, and there was not enough time for me to really give some real teachings and meditation instructions to my students. Probably some of them had lost touch with their inner well-being, their True Selves. We had lost our Root of Dharma, and we needed to come back to it quickest time possible. The purpose of conducting and leading Dharma activities was never a matter of ‘doing’ but a practice of ‘being’ – being peaceful, being contented, being happy, being helpful etc. As a Zen practitioner, your only important job is to become one with your inner practice, nothing more and nothing less. This is the real spirit of Zen.

So we need to have faith toward our journey of Zen. To ignite my students’ faith is always a part of my jobs, so I decided to call for a retreat then. Without faith, there’s no momentum in your practice; without diligent practices, you could never attain the sweetness of Zen. So we need faith to begin with.

So I vowed to ***be the change*** that I wanted to see in my

disciples. I encouraged all my students and friends to come back to the core of Zen teachings and practices, to train and nurture our True Mind and to manifest our warmth-heartedness that is imbued with strong faith and solid Zen practices.

Connecting with the Spiritual Energies

Q: Where did you have your retreat this time?

A: First I went to Rangoon to receive a Dharma Propagation Award given by the Myanmar government, and also gave some blessings to our newly built Dharma center. I then went back to Taiwan to start my retreat in Ling Jiou Mountain.

I went to bless every area in Ling Jiou Mountain, with the purpose to connect with the spiritual energies there. I then meditated in each and every area, and recited some prayers so that these areas could be connected with the same stream of Zen energy.

My retreat room was at the Guanyin Hall. I dreamt

about myself being trapped in suffocation in a crystal ball in the Guanyin Hall – and I thought: am I going to die there? Does it mean that I am going to enter nirvana soon?

But if you look back at the Guanyin Hall from the angle of the Oceanic View Platform (觀海台), this range of mountain is actually akin to a sleeping Buddha; and the crystal-ball-liked building is located exactly at the acupuncture point of the Buddha's ears – ah, now I realized that it was a sign that I had to focus on the practice of Guanyin Bodhisattva, which is the Silent Practice of Mindful Listening (Perfect Samadhi Absorption through Listening, 耳根圓通). So I decided to name this place as Guanyin Hall and made it my retreat room.

Originally, I never intended to make it a fasting retreat this time. Mr. Deng, a devoted student whom I met in Myanmar brought me some good quality honey salt and I viewed it as a very auspicious sign. So I decided to do a fasting retreat, by taking honey salt water as my only survival substance. It was indeed a rare and precious experience.

Not long after that, I continued my retreat in the Ksitigarbha Hall. It was a very small place, but very comfortable to stay in. I had the most stable and insightful retreat experience in this sacred space.

Q: Any special signs and experiences during this retreat?

A: Ksitigarbha Hall is the best location in Ling Jiou Mountain to be connected to the Earth Energy. For Mr. Xiao who always volunteered himself to sweep the floor, hearing of the sound of bells or smelling of auspicious scent were his common and yet supernatural experiences. It was an auspicious sign that I could fully utilized the auspicious energy of this area to continue my retreat, with the pure intention to purify all obstacles of my future Dharma activities, as well as to bring harmony and joy to our entire Dharma team of Ling Jiou Mountain

I had a dream during this retreat. In that dream, there were five huge geese flying from the sky and landed on the earth; four of them landed smoothly and they stood up soon after their landing, but the last goose fell down due to slippery; with the fact that he was careful enough not to bring harms to some little birds just right

below him. I took it as a sign that I was actually the last goose – I was facing some ‘landing’ obstacles, but I managed to overcome them at the end. My main obstructions were always the little birds that depended on me for many things!

Q: Are you tired of too much Dharma activities? Does the transformation of the Sangha a necessary step in face of the great challenges coming from this fast changing society? After your retreat, did you design any vision for the future?

A: What is the most important aspect of practicing and realizing the Dharma? It is for the sake of all mother sentient beings. I did my retreat and Zen practices with the purpose of accumulating and recollecting my Dharma energy, so that I can serve more and benefit more sentient beings. This is the sole purpose of us going back to our root of Dharma.

Corporate entities emphasize on competitions and winning the limited resources, they talk about profits and benefits. As a Buddhist organization, our focus is entirely different. To make this lineage of Zen flourish and continue to flourish, we need ‘professionalization’

but not ‘commercialization’ or ‘utilitarianization’.

First, we need to go back to the root of Dharma – which is our Zen practices; and this is our Bodhisattva way of living our lives and benefiting sentient beings. Without this Bodhisattva spirit of altruism, our Dharma practices will decline and our Dharma activities are merely some mundane messiness and busyness. If this happens, then it is truly a sign of Dharma degeneration.

On the top of serious and vigorous Dharma practices, we must also learn how to lead, organize and manage our Sangha, this is my second point. I used to encourage our Sangha members to go back to FGS and learn from their advanced systems of organization and management. This new learned knowledge and skills will surely enhance our operations and improve our weaknesses. We need modern and updated system of managing and organizing our Sangha, and FGS is a model Buddhist Order from whom we could learn from. We can learn the skills of system management, social-welfare and education, as well as their personnel training (human resource development). These are the areas that we need to improve ourselves. Nevertheless, there are some areas of development in our order that I

am quite proud of: our Zen meditation retreats and practices; our Four Stages of Dharma Education, cross-religious dialogues etc. These are some good examples.

We must be willing to open our minds to using some modern tools in managing and leading our temples, monasteries and Dharma centers. With professional management tools and systems, we can dedicate more time and energy to our inner works – which is our Dharma practice itself. We can then spend more quality time and efforts in helping, educating and benefitting this world.

We must get-rid of small-mindedness and close-mindedness. Our cultural programs, Dharma activities, meditation retreats, educational system and charitable programs must be organized, utilized and led in a very modern, creative and professional way. Only through professionalization, *informatization* and modernization can we have a great vision and practical missions for the Buddhist community as a whole.

The Life Education system propagated by the Buddha, is always up-to-date and refreshing. It is a living wisdom tradition, that could evolve and self-aware of its own

evolution. The management and leadership of Buddhist organization are modern knowledge and skills that we must equip ourselves with. In accordance with the technological trend of democratic society, we must design, measure and implement the concept of KPI (key performance indicator) in all areas of our Dharma organizations and their activities.

In Chinese Mahayana tradition, we have the Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations (Rules of Purity for public monasteries, 百丈清規). These monastic rules divided the management of the monastic institution into two parts – the first part talks about monastic education and training, and the second part teaches us how to arrange and manage our monastic day-to-day living. It is truly a good monastic way in managing our day-to-day living and activities. This precious work even teaches us to be professional and dedicated in executing our missions, and it also talks about division of works, job rotation, study sequence, life-style management, medical system, hospice services, social contribution and creative engagement. I encourage all Zen students to grab a copy and read it yourself!

Later in modern era, the great Zen master, Grand

Master Xu Yun (empty cloud; 虛雲) reorganized and restructured the Sangha rules and its temple regulations. He created the surviving (self-sustainable) systems by the names of ‘Working Zen’ (工禪) and ‘Agricultural Zen’ (農禪). Grand Master Taixu (太虛) also created the concept of ‘Bodhisattva Center’ for all Zen monastic; and was instrumental in modernizing the Zen Mahayana School in Chinese Buddhism.

In facing various challenges of this modern society, Ling Jiou Mountain has to develop a new and updated system of leadership, education and management. May this sacred land become the beacon of hope of all Sangha members, be it lay practitioners or monks and nuns; May our Bodhi Mind prevails for the benefit of all!

Zen vs. Love and Compassion

Q: So as Shifu mentioned, you want our Dharma activities to flourish all over the world, at the same time you also encourage everyone to return to their inner home of authentic Dharma practices?

A: Whether you belong to the Northern (Mahayana) or Southern (Theravada) tradition of Buddhism, you are facing a fast-paced world of globalization and modernization. Monk or lay, we got to face these challenges with an attitude of humbleness and open-mindedness.

My main Original Motivation is always “Zen with Compassion” or “Compassionate Zen”. Zen practice is my root, the way to return to my Original Self. To accomplish Zen practice, you have to go through some hardships, but this hardship will transform into the fruition of sweetness and wonder in the future. With great and genuine compassion, you can then manifest your Dharma activities effortlessly and naturally. There’s no contradiction whatsoever between (inner) Zen practice and (outer) compassionate activities.

According to the sacred view of Avatamsaka, when you ‘manifest’ (or ‘extend’) yourself, you embrace the totality of all, you become ONE with the Universe; which is ***Multidimensional Coexistence*** in the world of Avatamsaka. And when you “dissolve” yourself into the great emptiness (or your Original Self) – that is Zen.

Zen is the real substance of everything – when you return to this ultimate substance, you naturally attain Oneness with everything – which is fully exemplified through countless interactions and combinations of causes and conditions – the multiple manifestations of the world of Avatamsaka. Both manifestation and dissolution are none other than the Unified World of Oneness – the Avatamsaka.

In Buddhism, we regard every phenomenon as the manifestation of our own mind or consciousness. Although everything is created by the projection of our mind, but it is governed by the universal law of karma and cause and effect. Within this great web and network of karmic connection, each and every sentient being is a unique and individual karmic memory body by itself. Each and every karmic memory body is interwoven into a great net of collective existence. There are two kinds of power controlling this existence – the power of Karma and the power of our Aspirations (vows).

The power of Aspirations arise when you make a wish to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings; whereas the Power of Karma is the power of your *samsaric* actions (of body, speech and mind). I

hope everyone can create and enhance their power of Aspirations by contributing oneself to the beneficial activities of liberating oneself and others; and NOT to spend too much time and energy in creating negative Karma energy. We must strive to nurture and enhance our Bodhi mind, and make this intertwined web of co-existence a positive vicious circle of joy, love, wisdom and healing. May we attain the highest fruition of awakening – which is the perfect, ultimate and unsurpassed Buddhahood.

Q: Shifu, do you want us to educate ourselves and to open our hearts and mind in facing the world as it is?

A: Yes, our whole life is a University by itself; and the practice of Buddhadharma is the empirical studies and practical exercises of life.

Our life takes many combined causes and conditions to manifest its current situations or results. Different causes combined with different conditions will bring different kinds of results. But ultimately speaking, it is all our mental projection – everything is created by our own mind. By practicing Zen, you are reminded to take back this creative power and to re-create a better world

for yourself and others. With the right vision of Zen, you can begin to see and project a whole new world imbued with wisdom, kindness and compassion.

Zen teaches us how to re-organize our life and to rearrange all these complicated combinations of cause and effect. In order to achieve a better future, in order to manifest the wondrous world of Avatamsaka – we need nothing but the practice of Zen. Compassionate Zen will inject freshness, liveliness, balances and beauty into every aspect of our existence, be it education, organization, Dharma propagation or even meditation retreats.

Zen is the total harmony and ultimate Oneness between ‘individuality’ and ‘totality’. By having these two aspects of existence in a state of beautiful harmony, we can envision a global family of love, peace and vitality. A holistic lifestyle of “***Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence***” will then be a very beautiful possibility.



Wait no more, Be Here NOW! As **THIS** is all you could have - our pristine
Present Moment Awareness.

6th Dialogue

Myanmar in the eyes of international World

My Connections with Kokang Region of Myanmar

Q: Shifu had organized a Thousand Monks Offering Ceremony at the Old street – was this place far away from your original home?

A: My father was an ironsmith in that area. He had his ironsmith shop just right in front of the Guanyin Temple.

Q: What makes that region an unstable area at the moment?

A: I don't really know what happened. The Old Street was controlled by Kokang people originally. When the new governor took over, they promoted nationalism and many wars had happened. Many brigand chiefs were fighting with each other for their own benefits and properties. Whoever won the war would grab the ownership of certain areas, and they would run and hide if they lost their battles. There were many different tribes near the borders, and Kokang was still a site of many violent conflicts, especially between the Junta forces and various ethnic armies.

Q: And there were many conflicts between various tribes such as Wa, Shan and others...

A: They will fight with each other as long as there are conflicts of interest. They are still fighting over the ownership of various resources such as material supplies, minerals, timber etc...

Q: So you went there with the wish to bring them some peace and harmony?

A: They had been fighting with each other for many years. So Kokang area is now controlled by the Myanmar army, and it has been quite peaceful since then, before that it was a dangerous area full of prostitutes and drug addicts.

Q: I also heard that Yunan people used to go there for gambling and drug trafficking? It's like a gangsters' underworld, full of criminals and organized crimes...

A: That's true. Of course, the government has been forceful in managing these activities, but there are still some corruptions and collusions here and there. That's the habitual tendency of local people. But fortunately, Kokang people are quite religious in some way. They believe in Guanyin Bodhisattva, and are quite engage in mixed religious practices of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Nevertheless, these are only some folk beliefs, and they only know how to pray for protections and survival. There's no basis of basic Buddhism, much less the practices of Mahayana Buddhism. When you don't have a solid belief and understanding about the law of Karma, you tend to be very violent and taboo-less in your actions and behaviors. They dare to commit any crime as they

wish.

I am glad that after the new government was formed, things are getting better and better. Myanmar Buddhism was introduced to the local people, and some nuns had established charity centers, old folks homes and orphanages. This is a good way to educate the Kokang people. Unlike the current Mahayana Buddhism, Myanmar Buddhism is very pure and unpolluted. This is truly their advantage.

Q: What's the difference between the Theravadin and the Mahayana traditions?

A: Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar is very strong and solid in its Dhamma education, their devotees put their *Dhamma* into their daily lives, and almost everyone is a faithful believer in the law of cause and effect. There's a lot of emphasis on actualizing an ethical way of leading their lives. This is what I called pure and genuine *Dhamma*. Unlike some corrupted and commercialized practices in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, Myanmar Buddhism is still very pure and original. They practice what they preach wholeheartedly.

Q: Have they abandoned their old way of living e.g. brigand chiefs, ethnic armies etc.?

A: There are still some guerilla armies around that area. This is an unsettled issue for quite some time, and I don't see any permanent solution at this moment.

Education as a Life-changing Tool

Q: How do you want them to change? What is this to do with your current project?

A: The most important factor for a developing country is her stability and prosperity. You become poor and helpless when you keep engaging in local conflicts and guerilla battles. Stability is truly the prerequisite for survival as well as sustainable development in this region.

But I have to look at these problems from the perspective of Myanmar People. You have to become a good and law-abiding citizen. We can help them to correct their way of thinking and living, NOT by

preaching theories but to engage with them directly and passionately. Education is the best way to change one's destiny and lifestyle. We are now promoting a holistic system of education, from kindergarten, primary schools and secondary schools up until university level. Linguistic studies such as Mandarin class will be emphasized as well.

Q: What are the special features in running such educational project in Myanmar?

A: Myanmar has a very ancient and solid foundation in terms of their own culture and Buddhist education. Foundational knowledge is very important in Buddhist education, and Myanmar culture provides a solid platform for Buddhist education to flourish.

So I don't want to change anything in terms of their original cultures and foundation, I just want to enhance their knowledge and skills by introducing them some fundamental views and practices of Mahayana Buddhism. I also want them to open their minds and hearts, to understand more about other major religions and spiritual traditions in the world.

Globalization is a global trend that you couldn't and

shouldn't avoid. Modern Buddhism is actually a good platform to connect yourself, your religious belief with so many other individuals and their spiritual practices all around the world. I want them to know and realize this kind of 'open-heartedness'. I want them to learn more about respect, tolerance, understanding and forgiveness. I want them to learn to love each other more and more. ***"To co-create a holistic lifestyle of Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence"*** - That's basically the main objective of this meaningful project.

Q: You've given us a lot of inspirations and encouragement; you've brought hope and love to this area. You had joined the guerilla army when you were 13 years old, was it because of this experience that you become so open-minded and inspirational?

A: I'd learned 'togetherness'. I have learned how to be together with many different races and tribes. I love their cultures and traditions. They are usually very nice and simple people. We need to teach them some better and civilized skills of survival. We can do this by implementing holistic, spiritual and practical education.

Q: This seems to be a big project, a new model for the future generation?

A: I can say it would be a very huge and well-planned project.

Building a University for Life and Peace

Q: Do they have anything as close as this in Myanmar? As far as I know, they have only some Monastic Institutes - am I right?

A: Their current education system emphasizes merely the study of Buddhism and nothing else.

Q: So you intend to build a multidimensional, integrated and comprehensive multiversity in this area, whereas Buddhist studies will only be a part of its curriculum?

A: Yes, we will be having a very comprehensive curriculum for the students, from primary and secondary levels up until the university. This multiversity is built with the vision of loving and protecting the mother earth. All subjects taught will be

related to our environment protection projects, either directly or indirectly. We will teach and educate each and every student practical solutions in solving global environmental issues such as global warming, climate change and other topics. Every subject will be taught by professional teachers and intellectual experts.

Q: To love the earth is to bring Peace to the world – am I right to say so?

A: They are basically the same. If you love the world, you will be bringing peace and harmony to your environment and everyone around you. If you become a lovely and peaceful person, you won't create disharmony or bring harms to the mother earth. You would be rejecting all forms of invasions, wars, pollutions, corruptions and the greed cultures. You will put all your efforts into creating a harmonious and self-sustaining global family of love and healing!

I myself was the product of wars and poverty. I managed to survive and strive, just because there were many people who loved and supported me. From a poor village to the world, I am now a Buddhist Zen Master who had built a Museum and some Dharma centers, who

had travelled all around the world to spread seeds of love and harmony – why am I doing these? Simply because I want all of us to live in a wonderful world filled with peace and healing, a global family of co-existence and mutual-respect.

I used to have a negative thought of ‘using wars to destroy wars’ – a very harmful idea indeed. But when I look at the Buddha’s wisdom words, he said:

*“Hatred does not cease through hatred at any time.
Hatred ceases through love. This is an unalterable
law.”*

I become peaceful and calm upon reading this. I’d changed my mind since then. There’s no point in using such a harmful and useless method to change the world. We can know its uselessness by looking at our history – what happened to Napoleonic Wars and Sun Yat-sen’s revolution? This world is changing from moment to moment and there’s no fixed and permanent solution for everything. Everything is in a constant flux, and we need to adjust ourselves and our strategies in coping with our challenges and stress. Rumi’s words might give you some insights:

*If a tree could only walk,
He would never have to fear being chopped down!*

We will use any method to deal with our current problems, as long as it can bring peace and joy to ourselves and others. When you help others without expecting any returns or results, you are a happy person. I want to be useful in providing poor families and homeless children in Myanmar a home to stay and study, I want to nurture their bodies, minds and spirit – so that they can contribute and help this world back when they grow up. I call this my ‘happiness project’.

Q: Despite all this systematic and logical trainings of mundane knowledge, are you going to incorporate meditation techniques into the curriculum as well?

A: Yes. Meditation will bring your mind home and make it peaceful and harmless. A real meditator is a master of his or her own mind, and a collective lifestyle of austerity and simplicity is ensured if we have enough meditators as a critical mass. Myanmar is a country that has a very peaceful and harmonious vibration; you would be enjoying yourself doing some meditation here. Almost all Myanmar people know to pray and

meditate. Visiting Buddhist temples is their leisure and hobby, they go there to pray, make offerings, meditate or circumambulating the *stupas*.

We will use our best resources to introduce Myanmar people and their beautiful Buddhist culture to the international world. I am just a simple Buddhist monk who had nothing good to offer to the world. But I want to contribute my heartfelt efforts to Myanmar and its people, so that this beautiful country and her legacy of spiritual beauty can be treasured and respected by the international world. This is my only meaningful legacy. The protection and preservation of Buddhist teachings are our best gifts to the world.

Whatever students or temples that I have – they are NOT my possessions. I don't own these. These are merely my tools and means to contribute my Zen practices to the world. It's never easy to establish some meaningful projects here in Myanmar, as the local people often viewed me as an 'outsider'. So I plan to have more interactions with the local people, to have more understanding of their needs and wants. It is truly a difficult job to begin with, but I am doing it willingly, mindfully and joyfully. So where do my willingness,

mindfulness and joy come from? They come from my Zen meditation practices. Zen and Zen practices are the source of all Dharma activities and meaningful endeavors.



The universe is a shining net. At each intersection of the net, there is a jewel, and each jewel reflects and contains ALL other jewels.

- Master Hsin Tao and friends at the Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town, Africa.

7th Dialogue

Cross-border Thinking

Cross-Strait relations – A Vision of Hope and Peace

Q: What's your view on Mainland China–Taiwan relations? What's Taiwan's current situation?

A: I think we are all matured adults, who are fully civilized enough to abandon wars and all kinds of violence, don't we? We need to let go many of our own limited ideas and biased opinions for the sake of mutual-respect and harmonious co-existence. As I mentioned a few times before, our main goal is to

help oneself and others in co-creating a global family of “*Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence*”. Taiwan is very small, and Mainland China is just right in front of us. In Chinese Feng Shui culture, China is actually the Bright Hall (明堂) of Taiwan. Both regions should have more communications and dialogues, long before we talk about communion or unity. We can view Taiwan as the Silicon Valley of both places, a unique region full of cultural, spiritual and technological advantages.

Q: You mean the Silicon Valley of Asia?

A: Taiwan has a bright and promising future in this area. Let's make Mainland China the major market place for Taiwanese products and services. We must have some little awakenings for us to see this possibility.

I was invited by a Christian scholar in Vienna to give a talk while I was on my trip traveling to Germany, Australia, Italy and Vatican. He asked me, “What are Taiwan's major issues today? Will there be any war in the future?” I said, “No, there won't be any war.” Why? For the sake of survival and economic reasons, we simply can't afford to have any military conflicts.

Q: Based on the foundation of mutual-respect and harmonious co-existence, what's next?

A: Let's make China a land of hope and a beacon of peace. Let us light up the bright lamp of a glorious future for both regions and the world. If we fully focus on the major global issues that we are facing now, we don't have any extra time or energy to fight with each other anymore. Peace, love, harmony, hopes will be our common agenda. In order to build a global family of love and peace, we need a sustainable peace resolution for all. For me, China seems to be a strong nation with military might, but she is not as hegemonic as those western imperialists. Although there are open and secret struggles within the Chinese government, but I don't see it as a sign of invading or meddling in other countries' affairs or sovereignty. So there are some bases or seeds for peace and hope there. Let the foundation of dialogues be solid, and we shall pass down this legacy of harmonious co-existence to our next generations.

Q: Shifu, your ultimate wish is to bring ultimate happiness to all humankind and to liberate them from all sufferings – am I right?

A: You are so right! This is always my sincerest ultimate wish. In order to get rid of all sufferings and to attain ultimate happiness, we must recognize all beings as *One Common Entity of Inter-being*. We need each other to survive and strive, so we need to help each other to survive and strive. Let go of all confrontations and resentment, let us begin anew every day with a fresh attitude of forgiveness, love and service. Peace is just at the corner, smiling at us and awaiting us to rediscover her glory and beauty.

Q: How to find a common ground for all religions? Aren't they all different in terms of their world-views and practices?

A: Every religion has its own unique features and functions. Each and every one of them has its own target group e.g. their believers or devotees. As long as we can make this world a better place for all, we should allow and rejoice in each other's success and popularity. No matter what religion it is, be it Christianity or Buddhism, we have a common goal of bringing joy, peace and fulfillment to this world and the after-life – so we must work together instead of competing or fighting with each other.

For me, the purpose of religion is never the glorification of god(s) or deities – it is the glorification of this human existence and the purpose or meaning of Life. God(s) doesn't need glorifications from us, but He definitely wants us to understand the Way, the Path and the Truth! To manifest our inner sacredness into worldly beauty is the duty of all religions and their devotees. The most sacred part of any religion is the service, love, compassion and grace that it could give and share with all fellow human beings. So-called 'holy' wars are never holy at all.

If you are born as a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim – you need to have a proper understanding of your own religions. Do not follow the deviant path of fanaticism and terrorism – violence and extremism were never the solution of any problem, much less the Divine message of our God(s) or Divinity.

Codependence, Co-existence and Multi-dimensionality

Q: Can we say that Buddhism is a religion that promotes multi-dimensionality or diversity of all sentient

beings?

A: Only through diversity and multi-dimensionality could we know and realize the totality of Truth and Wisdom.

Q: So the continuation of any species actually depends on its inter-being and co-existence with other species?

A: Yes, we can exist and continue to exist, simply because our inter-being and co-existence with everything around and within us. Diversity and multi-dimensionality can also arise from meaningful inter-being and harmonious co-existence.

Q: But how could we achieve this meaningful diversity, multidimensionality, inter-being and harmonious co-existence?

A: Stop all wars, conflicts and confrontations!

And we have to be aware of the harms of genetic engineering as well. Human health risk, genes resistance to antibiotics, toxic compound, ethical concern, distinction of certain species etc. These are our major concerns. GE brings more long term damages compared to wars – this is something we need to ponder upon before it's too late!

Q: But some say GE is actually an unavoidable technology used in eugenics?

A: Let us look at mother nature and learn from her – the whole ecological system will reach to a balance level when something grows too less or too much; it doesn't destroy some species out of some mechanistic consideration, it functions through the natural law of balance and harmony – so there's no side effects or negative impacts. But when GE was introduced by human being, some extraordinary phenomena and extreme conditions has appeared (as mentioned above) and this might cause distinction of some precious species on earth. GE is never the long-term or sustainable solution to our environmental and ecological problems but the major cause of them. It only works well on solving some temporary or partial problems; but holistically speaking, it will bring even more harms and negative impacts as a whole in the long run.

Q: So you are suggesting that we should learn how to forgive and be tolerant when we face challenges and confrontations? If we know how to give and forgive and accept things as they are (instead of trying to

change their natural course), the myriad diversity of all creatures and plants will be preserved and continued?

A: If we are preoccupied with negative emotions such as jealousy, over-protectiveness or hatred, the result of them will only be self-made disasters such as conflicts, competitions, wars, invasions or even extinction. What we want to achieve is an interdependent co-existence that is harmonious, balanced and delightful. Nothing in this universe can exist by its own – a plant needs combinations of various causes and conditions such as soil, water and air in order to grow healthily; so do us and everything else in the universe. This is the art of living for all sentient beings in the universe.

Q: In your view of so-called “Interdependent co-existence” – everything and every living being has its place and significance, but how about pests and useful insects – aren’t they quite different? And can this apply to eatable and uneatable plants etc. as well?

A: We are living in a relative world – what is good for you may be harmful to me and vice versa. **Every**

phenomenon in this world has its own opposite force. This is the universal law of balance – accept this nature, and we are going to co-exist happily and harmoniously.

Q: How do we turn these into a glorious state of Mindful Awareness, and how do we co-create a wonderful world of Avatamsaka?

A: We talked about the Power of Aspiration, remember? The result of great aspirations is the Buddha-field or Pure Land – which is a common sacred entity that embrace all multidimensionality and diversity – all in One and One in all – which is a state of sacred harmony and perfect joy. In this wondrous perfect state of being, all relative phenomena are transformed into absolute harmony; and all diversities are turned into an ultimate union of Perfect Oneness. This is truly the perfect manifestation and embodiment of our Buddha nature – the hidden but yet all-pervasive sacred energy of our Awakened Mind. Hence it is called “*the common entity of All Life*”.

The Four Stages of Buddhist

studies and practices

Q: The teachings of the Buddha are already perfect and complete by their own, why categorized them into these four stages?

A: Through my many years of study and contemplation, I realized that there are a lot of confusions and misunderstanding within the Mahayana Buddhist school of thoughts. Although we have a full set of Tripitaka in the twelve divisions, but many people don't know the best way to enter into the Dharma, or if they even realize that there's an entry point into it. So many Mahayana practitioner simply study or practice whatever method that is conveniently available to them, without knowing that there's actually a gradual system in studying and practicing the Buddhadharma.

So I divide these phases of Dharma studies/practices into Four Stages: the Agama, the Prajna, the Pundarika and the Avatamsaka. Each stage has different views, actions and meditations but they are closely connected and lead to one another. Every stage will have their own unique set of meditational guidance and instructions.

These four stages contain quintessential teachings of the Buddha such as Renunciation, Wisdom, Aspirations, Bodhi Mind (Bodhicitta) etc. This is a very complete and holistic mind map of studying and practicing the Dharma.

Q: How do we execute this study or practice plan? Is there any connection between these Four Stages with our daily living?

A: We need to understand that this is not a mundane curriculum, where you'll be given a certificate when you finish the studies – no, not like that at all. From a common being to the stage of perfect Buddhahood – this is the complete gradual path of Enlightenment, a perfect set of Life Education. All *samsaric* beings must go through these four stages – knowingly or unknowingly – if they want to attain perfect awakening and ultimate happiness.

So I've extracted the essence of the *Tripitaka* in the twelve divisions (of Mahayana school) and categorized them systematically into these four stages. Many versions of teaching materials and tools will be developed in near future, probably in the forms of

concise, medium length and full texts. This will enable people of different mental faculties or temperament to enter into different style or stages of the Dharma practices. We need to promote this modern Buddhist educational system in this 21st century.

You may ask: sir, can we only delve into the practices and studies of the Agama stage (the first stage) for one's whole life? My answer is: why not? As long as you have the conviction that this particular teaching is most suitable for you. But on the top of this, you must equip yourself with the fundamental and holistic view of the Buddhist Enlightenment and its different stages. I will give you an example here. If you practice or study Buddhist teachings in the Agama stage, your aim or goal is to attain *Arahatship* (and its four fruitions); for Prajna stage it would be the attainment of Sravaka and Bodhisattva; for Pundarika it is the fulfillment of your individual aspirations; and for Avatamsaka it is none other than the perfection of the wondrous world of inconceivability. So every stage has its own unique functions and purposes – no stage is higher or lower than the other – they are equally valid, mutually-supportive and closely related to each other.

This system of Four Stages focuses on the practical aspects of learning and realizing the Dharma, it is a lifelong study and accomplishment, a blueprint or road map of Perfect Enlightenment. How do we practice the Dharma in our day-to-day living situations? How do we meditate amongst our daily busyness and business? How to practice morality or ethical conducts in our life? How do we open our hearts and manifest our wisdom and compassion to others? These are the topics of our studies and practices within the System of Four Stages. It is a wonderful combination of the theoretical and the practical aspects of the Dharma, a systematic proliferation of Dharma into every living aspect and the gradual fulfillment of our aspirational vows and awakenings. This is a system of Life Education, a standardized path to Enlightenment.

Find Your Original Self

Q: What's the connection between the Zen methods that you teach and the system of Four Stages?

A: The purpose of our Zen meditation is to find back our True Self – in Zen words, the Original Face before we

were born – what is THIS??? Who AM I? What AM I??? Before this physical body that we call ‘I’ – which is a gathering of many causes and conditions – were produced, where was I? Where did this ‘I’ come from? What is our Original True Self?

Zen encourages us to keep asking these questions, until you reach to a point where all your doubts and confusions are purified or exhausted.... Then BOOOM!!! You are enlightened!

So this is the Zen that connects all dots within the system of Four Stages. Zen is the principal axis of the path to Enlightenment.

The purpose of Zen practice is to attain the *Dharmakaya* – the Truth body of our Buddha nature. But what is this *Dharmakaya* then? It is our Original Face, our True Self or Original Mind. It is the Primordial Nature of all phenomena, it is pervasively vast and deep; and it permeates all corners and directions of the Universe. It is omnipresent and omniscient. This is our Oneness with the Universe, our Wakeful Nature that connects us with everything else in the Universe. As mentioned, another name for this

wakefulness is the Common Entity of Oneness. We must transcend all forms and labels to reach this ultimate point of Emptiness (Shunyata) and Spiritual Awakening – and in order to achieve such transcendence, we will share with everyone some meditation practices contained within the system of the Four Stages. I hope you are clear about this now?

The attainment of Zen is actually the union of Wakefulness and Restfulness at the same time. In order to achieve this ultimate union, we need to practice, study, meditate, as well as helping all mother sentient beings. When you attain this point, you can then transcend all worldly phenomena and their illusory forms/labels; you can then benefit and liberate all beings care-freely, spontaneously and effortlessly.

These Four Stages of Buddhist studies and practices can be simplified as below:

- 1) **Agama stage** – the practices of precepts, Samadhi and wisdom;
- 2) **Prajna stage** – the perfection of awakened wisdom and insights;

- 3) **Pundarika Stage** – the altruistic practices and perfection of our Aspirations and Bodhi Mind, the Bodhicitta;
- 4) **Avatamsaka Stage** – the accomplishment of the inconceivable state of interdependent co-existence and multidimensionality; the wondrous sacred world of Inconceivability and Great Perfection.

From beginning-less life-times ago, all sentient beings used to be our fathers and mothers, and we are closely connected to each other spiritually or metaphysically. All beings are interconnected in this great *Indra* net of co-existence; it's the metaphysical internet and intranet that bind us altogether. In all ten directions and in three times (past, present and future), all sentient beings are interconnected in this great union of all-that-is.

Since all sentient beings have been our parents since beginning-less lifetimes ago, how could we abandon them and focus on our selfish benefits and interests? Hence we must also aim to help them as much as we can. But we are not a Buddha yet, so what should we do to help them? Then we come to one conclusion: in order to save and liberate all mother sentient beings, I

myself must attain full and complete Enlightenment as soon as possible. This urgent urge of becoming enlightened is the *Bodhi* Mind, the precious *Bodhicitta*. The path to Perfect Enlightenment is the holistic system of Life Education. The Buddhahood is nothing but our lifetime goal, our ultimate spiritual vocation. To help and benefit others, we also need the practice of Four Immeasurables (Compassion, Kindness, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity) to assist us along the way.

The study and practice system of the Four Stages need to be practiced according to its gradual path and stages. You got to attain and complete the previous stages before you can proceed to the next levels. If you don't have 'basic Samadhi' (根本定) in the beginning stage, how could you obtain the Consequent Wisdom (後得智) at the later stage? So please practice and study the Dharma gradually and systematically in accordance with these Four Stages. Everything goes stage by stage. Trying to reach the final level is like jumping into space.

Bodhi Mind and

Buddhahood

Q: Does this system of Four Stages similar to the *Lamrim Chenmo* (The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path) in Tibetan Buddhism?

A: The study and practices of the *Lamrim Chenmo* is NOT about textual understanding; we have to complete the two stages – generation and completion in order to progress on the path of our studies and practices. The System of Four Stages is also the same – the Agama stage is equivalent to the Generation Stage (in *Lamrim Chenmo*); and the Prajna stage is equivalent to the Completion Stage; and when you unify the two stages of Generation and Completion, it is the quintessential practice and fulfillment of the Precious Bodhi Mind (Bodhicitta); which comprises the beginning of Pundarika stage up until the beginning level of Avatamsaka stage; whereas the peak of Avatamsaka stage is achieved through the attainment none other than the highest teaching and realization of all – the essence of Mahamudra or Dzogchen (Great Perfection).

I've connected the essential teachings of Three Vehicles in this system. By using this system, we can also relate and connect the quintessential teachings of the Buddha with other religions as well. The Three Yanas (Vehicles) are equally the teachings of the Buddha in different styles and methods of presentation, they are essentially the same. When we talk about religions, we are talking about different wisdom traditions that propagate and promote the same essential teachings of compassion and morality – so why make so many dualistic differences among them? They are basically the teachings of great love and great compassion. When you look up, you see and know that there are stars, planets, satellites that co-exist peacefully within the vast Galaxy – there are reasons and room for everyone to exist as the way they are. If you have the profound view of Oneness, you can have the totality of everything in this great non-dual unity, you don't have to abandon one to obtain the other. The beauty of this universe is exemplified through its multidimensional co-existence and harmonious diversity.

Q: This System of Four Stages is truly amazing and captivating! It is a very attractive presentation – I

myself are very interested in knowing more about it!

A: The practice and realization of Dharma must be done according to its gradual stages and paths. You must know your current standard before you can move on to the next level. Your self-awareness is vital to do this.

Q: So all Yanas – Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana- they all begin with the level of Agama?

A: Yes, we must begin from the very basic of things, as this will lay a solid foundation for our future studies and practices. In the Agama stage, you would be able to transcend and purify your wrong views or attachment on all appearance or existence. After this, take note that it is easy for you to attach to the other extreme – which is the emptiness aspect of things; therefore you need to practice the Wisdom – the Prajna aspect of the Path. In Prajna stage, you are able to purify your ‘thinking confusion’ (破思惑); and then by practicing Zen, you attain total freedom. So there’s no mention of any Yana here – it is merely a difference in terms of your progressive levels or stages.

After you’ve laid down your solid foundation in the

preliminary stages of Agama and Prajna, what are you going to do next? How should you serve and benefit all mother sentient beings? You begin to perform and manifest all your activities in liberating others – you’ve reached the stage of Dharma-pundarika. This is a stage where you generate and perfect your Bodhi Mind (*Bodhicitta*). In order to attain Perfect Buddhahood, you must equip yourself with vast and profound learning – this is exactly the requirements in the stage of Avatamsaka. If you’ve planted some good Bodhi seeds (seeds of Enlightenment), you’ll reap the fruition of omniscience in this stage.

The stage of Avatamsaka is the fruition of your enlightened Buddha Mind. It is a perfect and wonderful world of interdependent co-existence and inter-being. In this final stage, you can make all conditions and connections as a path of your Dharma practice. Hence the Buddha path is a path of Omniscience – by becoming the all-knowing one, the enlightened Buddha, you can know and understand all phenomena in this Universe, you can even perceive past and future life conditions of all beings. The Omniscient Buddha knows all and saves all – this, indeed, is the Perfection of his

Omniscient Wisdom, the great Parjanaparamita, the perfect awakening as his primordial wakefulness.

Q: Wao! I am totally impressed and in awe! From Agama, Prajna, Dharma-pundarika to the inconceivable state of Avatamsaka – this is truly a clear map that leads to the pinnacle of Perfect Enlightenment! This is my first time in hearing such clear and enlightening explanation!

A: In future, we will use this Four Stages of Buddhist Education as a vital axis for the curriculum in the University for Life and Peace. Each stage will contain holistic syllabus for a timeframe of twelve years. The highest achievement of this University is its Vision of Avatamsaka, where all schools of Buddhism are taught in an integrated manner and all religious traditions are being introduced as well. As I mentioned, we aim to achieve and co-create a holistic lifestyle of *“Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence”*.

Q: So we are encouraged to learn about other religions as well?

A: When you understand the essence of all religions, you

would be very happy in having dialogues with all religious leaders. We will learn how to listen, understand and share with one another the essence of love. We can also work with each other in many different levels.

Our University will be focusing on the studies of ecology and environmental protection as well. We will provide practical and sustainable solutions to various problems and issues. No university in the world has done this, and we are going to become the pioneer in this area.

Our survivals and well-being depend so much on our mother earth. Our mother earth is a living organism by herself, and we need to respect and treasure her instead of simply using and exhausting her boundless supplies of natural resources. One day, if the ice of Arctic and Antarctica are melting dramatically due to global warming and climate change, the sequence and harmonious balance of four seasons on earth will be damaged tremendously; crop production will be hugely affected as well. This global crisis will then create havocs and unwanted disasters all over the world. So we need to love, protect and heal the mother earth before

it's too late; so I am promoting this meaningful movement at this point of time.

Q: Shifu's views on this issue are very clear and precise. In order to benefit more people, we should publish more teachings of yours on this special topic.

A: Thank you very much! Ralph, the designer of MWR once asked me, "Why do you want to do all these?" – I seemed to be a weird guy for him. In many people's view, this world is un-savable – so why even bother to invest our love and energy in saving it?

Great Compassion, Great Enlightenment

Q: Shifu has a child-like innocent mind; your pure heart is beating together with the breath of this mother earth!

A: We have to maintain this childlike nature of ours! This is due to the power of Zen meditation. When you do Zen meditation, your sacred inner energy is also vibrating on a very high level. Your heart and mind are

always open and receptive. Your intuitive mind is strong and sensitive enough to cut-off all your discursive thoughts, and you are able to pacify or purify your habitual tendencies. In order to purify our dualistic thinking habits, we need some mind trainings in the Agama stage – which is the training of calm-abiding and stable focus. In the teachings of Agama, you will find some very touching and inspirational stories of the Buddha. They are all mental trainings that we could use to tame our monkey minds in our daily living.

Q: Most of us think that the so-called ‘Mahayana’ is greater than the Theravada tradition e.g. the ‘Hinayana’ – am I right?

A: Not necessary so. It all depends on your personal preferences and levels. To practice the Dharma, we need to do it systematically and gradually. A step by step blueprint or road map is always better than none.

The Therevada (always mistaken as ‘Hinayana’, the ‘small’ vehicle) is a set of original teachings that can be traced back to the Buddha himself. It is a very pure, authentic and lively tradition. The teachings of

Tantrayana also derived from its source of the great *Nalanda* tradition; only our Mahayana tradition was a bit loose in terms of its source of lineage. The Mahayana tradition had its lineage long time back but sadly, it has now lost its root. The two main aspects of Mahayana teachings are its Sutrayana teachings, and the unique practice of Zen.

We must practice the Dharma according to this system (or gradual stages):

Theravada trainings → *Mahayana practices* → *Tantric meditations*.

You must follow this sequence mindfully and carefully.

The trainings and meditations of the Tantra belong to the stage of Avatamsaka. In Avatamsaka's teachings, you can manifest different aspects of your Buddha activities. You can connect every dot of your experiences and make them a network of glorious Dharma. In Avatamsaka, anything good or bad can be transformed into the nectar of Dharma. "*Great Compassion, Great Enlightenment*" is the motto in this stage, where you could use and utilize all aspects of your life and make them your tools of becoming an

omniscient Buddha!

Q: Does Myanmar Buddhism belong to the Theravada tradition?

A: You can say that. But the main focus is to practice and realize the wisdom aspect of the Dharma. In this aspect, the Mahayana tradition emphasized a lot on the importance of ‘correct and pure Views’.

Q: Does our Views equal to our Awareness?

A: Views are your opinions and understanding. If you have wrong or perverted views, then you are stuck in somewhere. If you are stuck, then you won't have wisdom to understand the reality of all phenomena. In Zen's views, the Buddha's teachings and the wisdom within it are always fresh, organic and lively – it is the infinite source of boundless liveliness and dynamism. In Zen we used to say:

*The subtle Dharma Gate that does not rest on words
or letters;
but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures.*

So ‘nothingness’ – the pure absence of everything solid and obstructive, is the True Wisdom of Zen. This pure

emptiness is the true wisdom which is primordially bright and clear all the time.

Q: Shifu talked about many things – the MWR, international dialogues, cross-border thinking, and religious harmony etc., but should we dissolve all these into one essential state of being, the great practice of Zen - which is actually the totality of what we perceive and experience – am I right? When our mind rests itself in a state of meditative stability, it can also manifest great love and great compassion! Everything goes back to the substance of Zen - your wisdom really opens up my mind and heart!



Hatred kills, but love HEALS - Master Hsin Tao praying for the victims at the very site of 911.

8th Dialogue

Like tree, like fruit -
Without a sheep, there
can be no wool

Zen – the Spiritual Art of Returning to Zero

Q: Shifu, what's the Power of Meditation? How to transform our inner Zen practice into the outer actions of great love and great compassion?

A: This has to be done inside-out. Like this:-

***Inner peacefulness → Mindfulness and Right Views
of Dharma → Compassionate actions or active
engagement***

This must be done step by step, gradually and systematically. That's why we are promoting the Systematic Buddhist Training of the Four Stages.

Q: Do you think that your views on this are the same as Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教) or Human Life Buddhism (人生佛教)? Where are the differences between these two types of Buddhism?

A: It is not necessary to draw a parallel here. Humanistic Buddhism can be also practiced through the understanding and realization of these Four Stages. The main purpose of this systematic training is its graduated levels and unique features of transcending the level before it.

Q: So we must also aim at transcending the so-called Humanistic Buddhism?

A: Yes, we transcend but we also include it at the same time. Transcendence and inclusiveness, both at the same time.

- Q: Many people talk about emotional healings nowadays, what's your views on this?
- A: We can transform and heal our emotional problems through Zen meditation. With Zen, all negative emotions are dissolved into '0'.
- Q: Return to zero? All emotions return into zero?
- A: Zen is the spiritual art of returning to zero. We need to know Zen techniques, and ask ourselves: what kind of New Life that we want to start afresh when the zero point is achieved? Zen will solve and answer all these questions.
- Q: What are the tools that you use in order to guide us in returning to zero? What methods will you use? You talked about transcendence and inclusiveness, not many people are relating this with the essence of Zen practices.
- A: In Zen, ultimately speaking, there are no levels or stages. Once you transcend everything at once, you immediately return to zero. You are back to your primordial point, your Source. We can use all kinds of techniques or methods to achieve this primordial

point.

Q: How's the method used by D.T.Suzuki in explaining Zen? Was it more analytical and descriptive? He did try to destroy all man-made logics and systems though...

A: As I said before, there's NO system or stages in Zen – 'no system' is Zen's best system – do you understand? Human beings tell you to think outside the box – but Zen will tell you that there's NO box to begin with. Being analytical is also a kind of limitation, isn't it? How do you attain the zero (*there's no box*) – that's the big question or great doubt (疑情) in Zen that we need to cultivate.

Q: How does this 'returning to zero' help common folks in terms of their body, mind and spirit?

A: Zen helps you to discover your True Self – that's our best contribution. Who am I? Am I this emotion, thought or feeling? So Zen helps you to find your real source of being, your Original Self or your True Source. New life and organic body, mind and spirit will arise from this Primordial Point – do you get it?

Zen Practice, Zen Realization, Zen Views.

Q: Is it true that we can only achieve this through Zazen (Zen Meditation)? Any other form of Zen practices that we could use to help us in achieving this?

A: Zen is something you need to mingle yourself with. You got to practice and realize its essence! When we talk about Zen cultivation (參), it means investigation (探討) and realization (明白); and your realization comes from your vigorous investigation. What are you investigating then? You are investigating the source of everything, which is your Primordial Point. Once you realize your Primordial Point, you can then begin anew with so many possibilities.

It's just like clearing your storeroom and make it back to 'zero'. Once everything is cleared, you then put in some new things – something that you would like to keep and use in the future; not something useless and messy as before. So to 'clear' all your negativity and return to your Primordial Point – this is the real practice of Zen.

Q: Everyone has emotions and feelings. Let's assume that there's a very angry man who come to see you, how would you teach him to 'clear' his emotions and return to zero? Will you teach him how to meditate?

A: I'll ask him to ask himself: "What is THIS? Why and what happened?" – This is how we cultivate Zen!

Q: So we must first find out the reason?

A: Ah, just go straight to its cultivation! Just 'zen' it out. Ask yourself some questions and then breakthrough them, and then BOOM!!! – Some realization will come!

Q: Wao, I see. That makes a lot of difference!

A: Just 'Zen' into all your questions and doubts – different doubts has different way of cultivation, and it will bring out different solutions.

Q: Shifu, have you ever had many problems or difficulties in your life?

A: Of course I did. My problems made me who I am today – Thank you!!! (smile)

Q: So do you consider yourself a kind of *prophet* now?

A: No, not like that.

When an angry person comes to you, look at him and find out the reasons why he is angry? What are the reasons? What's the point of being angry? That's my job as a Zen teacher. That's all.

Q: So what's the point of being angry?

A: You have to cultivate the doubts and '*Zen*' it out! "What are the negative effects of being angry? What are the benefits of being peaceful?" - Just '*Zen*' them out!

Q: So do you need to see them on one to one basis to sort things out?

A: I teach them to do the same practice – just '*Zen*' it in and '*Zen*' it out. Very simple and effective as well. Same Zen method, but it will give you different solutions for different problems.

Q: How long would it take to do this kind of Zen cultivation?

A: It depends on individual. It really depends on your 'force of awaking' (悟力). It depends on your level of

realization. It depends not on me but solely the person who ask the questions.

Q: Generally speaking, will it take a long time?

A: It's like doing some detective works – we need to look for many signs and clues. **‘Just do it!’** and **‘Zen it yourself’** are Zen's ultimate motto in finding the true answers of life.

Q: Merely sitting in Zen position is not enough?

A: Our way of cultivation is to do sitting Zen.

Q: When you do sitting Zen, are you cultivating (*‘Zen’ning into*) your question/problem/doubt?

A: There are some prerequisites to do sitting meditation. But when you sit and cultivate the problem, you need to focus on it 100%. Your answer comes from your intense engagement with your doubts.

Finding Individual Experiences in Group Practice

- Q: So we just sit together and ‘Zen’ it in and out in the way you described instead of seeing you one by one?
- A: Collective meditation or group practice is a way to do it as well. When you sit together with many Zen practitioners, you are cultivating your own Zen and everyone else is also doing the same. In short, you will gain your individual experiences (the answers) by doing this group practice of Zen cultivation.
- Q: Everyone sit together, but everyone does his/her own Zen cultivation?
- A: Exactly. Same method is used, but everyone will get different answers since they have different individual doubts or questions.
- Q: Are you saying that different individuals should gather together and do the same Zen practice within this great circle of Zen?
- A: Yes! Zen it in and out together; we might use the same *koan* (public case, 公案) to do it, and everyone will get their own unique answers.
- Q: Using the same *koan* to solve different questions at once?

A: Yes. The whole practice of Zen is truly a DIY self-realization process.

Q: Let the answer comes by itself, which is purely a DIY process?

A: Yes. No one can help you or give you the solution. You have to help yourself out – 100%.

Q: So your duty is just to help your students in searching for their own answers?

A: I will teach and discuss with you about the method, but you got to do it yourself. I am your GPS in leading your way to where you want to be. Use me and my guidance, and you shall reach your solution/destination in no time. This is so far the best method in doing any consultation!

Q: Did Zen cultivation solve any of your own problems?

A: Of course – it solves my every day's problems very well!

Q: Different problems at different time?

A: Exactly. Things change every moment and every day. Nothing is permanent, so do our problems.

Q: You solve all your problems only by doing Zen cultivation?

A: Of course – I am a Zen Master! I do Zen cultivation, and my realization and clarity come from it; and then I use these qualities to solve and deal with my everyday's situations and problems. There's no greater source of solution than Zen cultivation.

If you cultivate Zen, you'll gain realization; if you're realized, clarity will appear; when clarity appears, you can solve your problems easily and effortlessly.

Q: And you have had your own confusions as well, and you also became enlightened because of them?

A: Zen says, "No confusions, no Enlightenment." – I had 100, 1000 or even 10,000 types of confusions – so did my realizations and enlightenment!

Q: The key point here is our willingness and commitment to engage in Zen cultivation?

A: You are right.

From Suffering to

Happiness – Mind Transformation and Transcendence

Q: Since when you've discovered the preciousness of Zen?

A: Are you with your preciousness now?

Q: Even since we practice Zen with you, we've found many precious things along the way! But is Zen meditation suitable for everyone?

A: Absolutely yes. Continue your cultivation and investigation – do it again and again, and you'll become joyful and happy one day!

Q: So the ultimate goal of Zen cultivation is to gain happiness?

A: Zen liberates you from all sufferings and brings you real happiness. You must ask yourself: "Why am I not happy now?"

Q: Make it a question and ask ourselves: "Why am I not

happy now?”

A: This is Zen question, the correct question to ask yourself. You must find out the real reason why you are not happy. Many philosophers ask the wrong questions, or they ask the right questions in a wrong way. Hence they ended up with more depression and anxiety. Look at Nietzsche and others - they didn't have a happy life although they had been asking the same philosophical questions to themselves almost their whole lives.

You won't find the right answer to your unhappiness – why? Simply because you've begun in a wrong place.

Q: If you are not happy, that means you are cultivating Zen in a wrong way?

A: How can it be right when it doesn't bring happiness to you?

Q: So we should make ourselves happy even before we start to practice Zen?

A: Not like that. You will definitely experience all kinds of emotions and thoughts during your cultivation – emotional turbulences, exciting discoveries,

comparisons etc. There's nothing wrong with these experiences – most importantly, you must know how to transform and transcend all of them. If you know how to let go of them and be free and happy, then your whole life will be burden-less and carefree!

Q: This is the point! It's about transformation and transcendence!

A: It is a great shift, a real growth, a big change. It's about self-transformation and self-transcendence.

Q: How could we achieve that? Sounds quite difficult for me!

A: For example: if you are very poor and have no money now, you must cultivate Zen and ask yourself – how can I turn it around and transform this current situation?

Q: You mean to think about ways to make myself rich and wealthy?

A: It shouldn't be an imagination – ask solid questions, keep asking until you can find a way out!

Q: It sounds so difficult! How?

A: Not difficult at all!

Poverty has its own difficulty. Being wealthy also has its own problems.

But if you become not poor and not wealthy, who are you then?

Q: It feels so difficult when I look at my bank book!

A: When you look at your bank book, you should tell yourself: “My bank book looks like this at the present moment, but it really doesn’t matter. To find an ultimate solution – a way out, this is my most important task now!” - then you keep doing your investigation or cultivation like this.

Q: So even we can’t solve our real problems, but at least we could transform our mind?

A: Oh you can transform and transcend all situations in your life – this I can guarantee! Life and its conditions are changing all the time and nothing is permanent in this world. But do you know how to seek for a way to transform it? How would you like it to transform? These are the questions you need to ask yourself. You need ‘Zen’ into your questions and ‘Zen’ out some

ultimate answers and solutions!

Q: So you are encouraging us to cultivate Zen, at the same time to also do our future planning? To think and plan about how should we change in the future?

A: You don't need to do any planning. The answers will come out from your big questions, naturally and spontaneously.

Q: It's just like when you were building the MWR and you had no money to begin with; you meditated on this "no money" *koan* and all sorts of assistance just came by themselves at the end? Was this the case?

A: I never cultivate "How to bring in some money for MWR?" – Not like that. I simply ask myself: "As a Buddhist monk and Zen master, what should I do to contribute to this society?" – MWR came out as the ultimate answer. So what's my job after the answer popped out? "JUST DO IT!" was my next action. So I executed my action plan unceasingly until MWR was built.

Q: It's raining now...

A: And a beautiful rainbow will appear!

Q: Why is everyone rushing out to see the rainbow?

A: When correct situations come together, correct result will naturally appear!

Q: So we can do Zen cultivation on any problem, including financial problem?

A: You can make anything your cultivation of Zen. I can simplify the process as below:

Ask correct questions → cultivate or 'Zen' into the questions → find the answers → apply the solution – “just do it!”

Q: Can we cultivate on other people's problems and solve it for them?

A: You have to solve your own problems first. You got to attain liberation by yourself, and this applies to other people as well. They need to do their own Zen cultivation, find their ultimate answers, and apply the solution in their own lives.

Zen says “No one can become enlightened for you – you have to attain it yourself!”

Your GPS of Zen Cultivation

Q: I am investigating: “What’s shifu’s saying?,” “Who am I?,” “What am I?” etc.

A: Yes. That’s limitless cultivations on asking a question. Use this investigative tool as a way to solve all your mundane problems.

Q: Does everyone need to only focus on asking their own questions?

A: I’ll give him or her a GPS for Zen cultivation. I’ll be the guide, but they will find their answers themselves.

Q: What’s the common tool that you use?

A: “Without a sheep, there can be no wool” – I often use this principle as a tool. This is not to be understood as a fixed phrase. This is simply an analogy of how we should investigate or cultivate our questions.

Q: And you also used a *koan*, like the one you told us – “Hearing the message of an egg” – the story of Zen

Master Mazu's sister in law?

A: Ah! If a person couldn't understand the Zen cultivation I teach, even if I keep talking to him or her for half a day, then I'll ask him or her to do this *koan* practice. Just quiet your mind and focus on this *koan* – your problems will be taken care very well. Just stay quiet and listen – listen to the message from the egg!

But I have a third method as well...

Q: What's your third method?

A: You should have loving kindness and compassion.

Q: So you are jumping from "hearing the egg" to the practice of love and compassion? That's pretty fast and drastic, no?

A: This is the ultimate GPS of Zen – after you've got your answer when you practice the *koan* of listening to an egg, then what are you going to do with that answer? "Great love and great compassion" is the next step – to care and give more, to contribute and to serve.

Q: So this is the Power of Zen?

A: Zen is about the art of Transformation and Transcendence – how can we be more loving and more compassionate? How to help this world in a better way? How to be a useful person, a Bodhisattva? Not only Zen can help us to transform and transcend, it can also help others to do so.

Q: So this is the third step, what's the fourth one?

A: The fourth step is this; "Everything's OK" – nothing's wrong in everything, everything's OK; and I am joyful and happy. Everything is so smooth and easy!

Q: Do you have a fifth step? What's the fifth one?

A: The fifth one is to die peacefully....hahahaa!

Q: It means to die in any way is OK?

A: To die in gratitude is the best way of dying. When you have gratitude, your whole beings is vibrating at a higher level of virtuous karma, you will surely go to a higher and better place. Be thankful to everyone and everything that has enriched your life while you are living – this is the best mindset to have while you are dying. The best way and the Zen way to die is this. You can die happily and thankfully – this is the fifth step!

Q: Shifu, you've told us the GPS of Zen, is there a sixth step after this?

A: Nothing else now. Look, the rainbow is out now – quickly go and have a look!

Q: Once this conversation is done, I'll go out and have a look....no, wait a minute, your seventh step is to look for the rainbow?

A: Ok, we talk about love and compassion – why we need to have love and compassion? Why?

Love and Compassion come from Egoless-ness

Q: How could Zen practice produces love and compassion?

A: Why Zen teaches us about loving kindness and compassion? Because your views are your Dharmic DNA, that will determine your fruition of practice. When you have the right views of great love and great compassion, you are respecting the relative aspect of the ultimate truth, which is Karma and cause and

effect. You can then function correctly to help all sentient beings – this is the Bodhisattva's practice of love, service, giving and compassion.

In short, Zen only talks about two things: manifestation and dissolution. When you manifest your True Self, you become all things and everything; when you dissolve your egoistic mind into emptiness, you return to the original root of your true nature – which is your Original Mind, the Primordial Point. It is best described in a verse in the Shurangama Sutra:

“First, I united above with the fundamental wonderfully enlightened mind of all the Buddha of the ten directions, and possessed the same power of kindness as the Tathagata.

Second, I united below with all beings in the six realms of the ten directions, and shared with them the same plea for compassion.”

So now you possess two kinds of ‘supernatural power’ – the power of supreme kindness and great compassion.

So Zen brings you the unity of oneself and others – the subject and object become one non-dual entity, and you become ONE with everything and everyone. Your

problem is my problem, your suffering is my suffering – we are all interdependent and we co-exist as one common entity of life, and the essence is love and joy. It's my duty to help everyone and serve everyone. We are ONE global family. Once you reach this understanding, your Bodhisattva actions will appear spontaneously and organically!

Q: That's why you said:" When your mind is at peace, the world is at peace"?

A: This is my tool in propagating the Dharma, some mottos in spreading our views and practices!

Q: Our Dharma activities, our thoughts and feelings, our inner peace and stability – how should we synchronize and integrate these three aspects of our being?

A: By not separating them as three different things. MWR is my way of propagating the Dharma, the University for Life and Peace is also my way in manifesting my activities. And then there's my day-to-day living and my ways in dealing with others. You can integrate these three aspect into one continuous stream of natural manifestation. Make them a flow of life, a stream of meaningful meetings...

Q: As I know, some Zen practitioners are not so concern about the practice of love and compassion...

A: When you have an 'I' – a strong ego, how can you be compassionate? Only when you dissolve your 'I', your strong attachment towards your identity, can you be kind and compassionate. All compassionate actions begin with an attitude of egoless-ness. Why we have so many problems in this world? Simply because there are so many 'I's fighting and confronting with each other!

So this 'I' will be our target of Zen investigation or cultivation. There will be dualism and confrontations as long as you are holding on to a strong 'I'. Competitions and violence will happen when there are confrontations. What we need to achieve is diversity through harmonious co-existence, NOT a war zone filled with egoistic violence and unhappiness.

Q: Some even say God loves everyone, but must you pray to only one God?

A: It's good if everyone could be as loving and unconditional as the God that they are praying to.

The purpose of Zen is to return to one's true identity – which is 'egoless-ness' or 'no self'. When you become truly ego-less, true kindness and genuine compassion will arise in you automatically. This world would be a better and kinder place if everyone knows how to meditate – don't you think so? There would be definitely less violence, conflicts and wars to say the least!

Q: When our 'I' is dissolved, then every problem can be solved easily?

A: Exactly so! Remember – *when your mind is at peace, the world is at peace!*

From Zen Practice to the cultivation of Compassion

Q: Is it true that some Zen practice never include compassion as their main cultivation? Or maybe some Dharma practitioner never does Zen meditation at all?

A: All Dharma practice is the practice and training of the mind. As mentioned before, we need to focus on the

gradual path to Enlightenment as it was outlined in our systematic Buddhist training of Four Stages. We must study, practice and realize the Dharma systematically and gradually. We should do it step by step without being hasty or impatient. We need to treat it as a holistic and comprehensive spiritual program. This system itself is perfect and complete, and you can do it in accordance with your level of understanding and awareness. As Milarepa once said, “Do your practice slowly, so that you could reach Enlightenment quickly and effortlessly!”

Q: What’s the main purpose of Agama teachings?

A: To deal with ourselves, our own mind – which is the greatest enemy of all.

Q: And the purpose of Prajna teachings is to train and develop our mental intelligence – am I right?

A: No, its objective is to deal with other people or other sentient beings.

Q: How about the teaching of Dharma-pundarika?

A: It’s about performing all compassionate activities in order to benefit all sentient beings. These Bodhisattva

actions have to be done collectively, without any slightest notion of personal gain or fame.

Q: How about Avatamsaka?

A: Avatamsaka teaching shows us the way to be harmoniously co-existent with one another. It is a glorious world of sharing, interconnectedness and integral harmony. It is a wondrous pure land of love and forgiveness.

This system of Four Stages (Agama, Prajna, Dharma-pundarika and Avatamsaka) is the principle axis of my Zen cultivation. It is a gradual and affirmative path to Perfect Enlightenment.

Q: So the process of study is this:

Agama → Prajna → Dharma-pundarika → Avatamsaka

Am I right?

A: Absolutely. From Zen cultivation that leads to the attainment of egoless-ness, and then the natural generation of loving kindness and compassion.

Q: But two years ago, you told us that there are no stages in this system?

A: While you are learning and practicing – there must be some stages involved; but when you attain the realization of the Dharma, you've transcended all stages or paths. There are the two sides of the same coin.

Q: So must we go through and follow the system step by step? Will I get confused if I learn Dharma-pundarika first, and then move to Agama?

A: If you have time, I suggest you follow the system slowly but surely. You have to do it step by step, one step at a time. But if you really have no time, I suggest you just choose one of them and study/practice it deeply and thoroughly.

This system of Four Stages is specially designed in such a way that will enhance and smoothen your spiritual evolution. It is just like growing a tree; you must start from the root, the trunk, and then its branches and flower and fruits. This is the progressive chart of Zen practice. You can enter into this Zen zone from different entry points, but the stages of the path remains the same and unchanged.

Q: How about other Buddhist orders or organizations? Do they accept this system of Four Stages?

A: Well, it depends on our affinity and karmic connection! We have built a network of connection, awaiting everyone's willingness to be linked together. An integrated platform of unity can definitely be built. It should be a co-creation by all and for all.

Q: Shifu, as you can see, many Buddhist like to engage themselves in various forms of charitable activities and financial donations, they are less interested in Zen meditation; but you said real charitable actions must be generated through the realization of Zen, how is it so?

A: Didn't I tell you before that "*Without a sheep, there can be no wool*"? First of all, you must ask yourself, "Why do I want to meditate?" Ask it vigorously until the answer pops up. Sit down and meditate only when you've found a convincing answer. Everyone need to ask themselves: WHY do I want to do this? Why?

Find out the Why, seek your own answer; only then you could be truly kind and genuinely compassionate – do you understand?

Q: Will you ask everyone the same question like this?
You intend to test them one by one?

A: I am just kicking the ball back to them, demanding them to investigate Zen and find out the answers themselves. Remember: *“Without a sheep, there can be no wool”*!

In short, they come to me with a reason. This reason will manifest as the end result of Zen, and their questions will bring out the ultimate answers at the end – do you get it?

Q: Can any outsider come and see you?

A: It depends on our karmic connection or affinity, it really depends! I am the WIFI of Zen, it really depends on you whether you want to connect with me or not.

Q: Is everyone asking the same questions, again and again?

A: No, all questions are uniquely different.

Q: Please tell us more on your teaching technique of *“Without a sheep, there can be no wool”*?

A: This is an all-inclusive method. It contains all methods

and transcends them at the same time. Sometimes I use some words; sometimes there are no words at all. Sometimes I scold, shout and beat; sometimes I will be using some methods of love and care. It depends on whom I meet and their level of acceptance and mental faculty.

Zen cultivation doesn't start from your Zen sitting; it has to begin with your doubts, your big questions. After you've generated your questions, then you need to investigate it wholeheartedly and thoroughly! In order to do the investigation, you need to sit down and meditate.

Q: Is Zen meditation suitable for those who have emotional problems?

A: Everyone with problems can and should sit down and meditate. Even those who think that they don't have any problem – since this attitude might be the greatest problem of all!

Q: Maybe someone just came because he or she has some holidays to spend?

A: That's Ok as well. Come and enjoy some beautiful

scenery here – we have big blue sky, beautiful ocean, green trees and wonderful mountains. This is a pure sacred place that will make you happy and joyful. Just come and check it out for yourself.

9th Dialogue

The Power of Zen Meditation

Quantum Zen

Q: In your talks, you once connected Zen practice with Quantum physics; can a common person understand the connection?

A: Zen has the quality of Quantum mechanics. When you have thoughts in your mind, you generate some Quantum waves that will then shape your world and environment; and these waves shape and affect the material world around you as well. So Zen teaches us

to ‘stop’ our thinking mind.

Q: Stop our thinking mind?

A: When you are thinking, you create a confused material realm of manifestation; and you lose your energy of spiritual awareness, so you need to stop or cease your thinking mind; and return to your Original Mind.

I call this the practice of Quantum Zen.

Q: We can’t reshape our past and we can’t control our future. So what we have is only this precious moment – this moment, if used wisely, can transform all our past, present and future experiences – is that what you are saying?

A: The power of Zen transcends all limitations of time and space. It is not so much a philosophical debate but a practical question. In philosophies, we use a lot of our thinking mind. In Zen, we stop our thinking mind and come back to this moment of ‘*What Is*’ rather than dwelling on discursive thoughts of ‘*What if?*’ – This is the main difference. Zen is ‘Just Like THIS’ – the suchness of reality, right here, right now. Zen includes all, penetrates all and transcend all at the same time –

this is the Power of Zen!

When you have Zen, you go beyond time, space and all other limitations, you become free and carefree; you become One with the Universe or All-that-Is. When you are out of the zone of Quantum Zen, you live in a three dimensional world of time, space and all other limitations. In reality, time and space are our mental creations – they are illusive, transient and impermanent in nature.

Q: Its inconceivability goes beyond all words and languages, but why Shifu need to express it in words and language now?

A: Because without these words and language, you'll become even more confused!

Q: I understand your words and language, but I might misunderstand your true message, I might not realize what shifu have realized...

A: Words and language have their down-falls and limitation, but they are very powerful tools to convey and communicate. You must master this tool with ease and dignity. When you manifest your message through

words and language, make sure your messages are imbued with pervasive mindfulness and Zen energy; when you dissolve your tools of words and language, it becomes utter silence, total emptiness that embraces and contains all possibilities. You become One with this useful tool, so that you can use this tool to attain and achieve anything!

Q: But Zen claims that it is a special transmission outside the teaching; it doesn't depend or based on any written or spoken words – am I right?

A: That's when you've attain the essence of Zen – that Oneness is of course goes beyond all words and language. No words, spoken or written, can describe or lead you to that state of inconceivability. That's why I said you have to stop your thinking mind in order to attain it.

Q: Zen transcend all words and language, so it can use these words and language skillfully to help others?

At the end, all words and language have to be let go. Is this what happened when Buddha picked up a flower and Mahakashyapa smiled...?

A: You can interpret in that way. In short, when we manifest, it is like what was described in the Yijing (I Ching, 易經):

“Changes start from the Ultimate, from which come the two opposites, from which then the four phases, from which again the eight trigrams –

Thus manifestation of all things begin from Here...”

(易有太极，是生两仪，两仪生四象，四象生八卦。

《易经·系辞上》)

And when we dissolve it, it goes back to its Primordial Point of Zero – they called it the Ultimate of Non-being (Wuji, 無極) in Taoism. I am using Taoist language and words to explain Zen to you, do you get it?

Carefree Manifestation and Wondrous Dissolution in Zen

A: Whether you are in state of manifestation or dissolution, you are always free and at ease – this is the ultimate state of Zen. You have to have some

kungfu in achieving this, and at the end you have to let go and transcend even that *kungfu*!

Q: You are not yet there if you are still attached to your *kungfu*?

A: That's why you need to keep learning...

I always advice you guys to study and learn the Dharma diligently. When you attain this Primordial Point of Zen, you'll be at ease and carefree wherever you go, whatever you do. When you manifest your activities, you are pervasively everywhere in the universe; but when you dissolve everything and return to zero, you are back to the Ultimate Nothingness again – and this Ultimate Nothingness is your true home and your absolute nature of mind.

Q: I don't think many people can understand this...

A: This true home of yours is inconceivable and unfathomable. It is always there, but it cannot be grasped or captured. It has no color, no shapes, no labels, no forms. But it is so solid and real, yet you cannot pinpoint its location and position.

That's why Lao Tzu said,

*“Go forward in accordance with the movement of Tao
(道),
Move backward in accordance with the flow of Virtues
(De, 德)。”*

Sometimes it is easier to describe the essence of Zen using the language of Tao – don’t you think so?

Q: Scholars like D. T Suzuki and Hu Shih (renowned Chinese philosopher) used to say that there is great difference between Chinese Zen (Chan) and Indian Zen; they said the basis of Chinese Zen (Chan) is the Philosophical Thinking of Laozi and Zhuangzi; but in Shifu’s views, it is not as simple and mechanistic as this...it is so much deeper ... but why can’t they see it in the first place?

A: They are Zen scholars who approached Zen with their thinking mind. They like to discuss about Zen in a very intellectual and philosophical way, but that’s not the essence or reality of Zen. Zen is simply the ‘suchness’ of everything, it’s just like this – simple, organic, vivid and practical. Zen shows its true faces in every aspect in our daily lives.

Q: So Zen is free from all philosophical thoughts and

intellectual debates?

A: Zen has nothing to think or debate about – it is utter emptiness, pure nothingness – how can you talk or think about nothingness? It is like you can see something there, but there are no eyes that can see your seeing.

Q: You hear, but there are no ears? Is this what we call the Spiritual Light (靈光) of Zen, our own bright and luminous Mind shining?

A: Only by returning to your Original Mind can you activate the energy and power of Zen – there's no other way to do it!

Q: So the power of Zen does NOT merely rely upon the *koans* or other Zen practice that we are doing – am I right? Are we missing anything here when it comes to Modern Zen practices?

A: Look at Laozi – he didn't know what Zen is, but somehow he could express the essence of Zen so flawlessly and naturally – why?

Q: Zen school of Buddhism only appeared after the era of Laozi.

A: Exactly. So Zen is universal and pervasively true, it goes beyond all labels and limitation, it transcends time and space. Zen is always there – you only need to find ways to connect with it.

Q: Can we use Philosophical Thinking of Laozi and Zhuangzi to explain Zen and vice versa?

A: These are two different cultures. Philosophical Thinking of Laozi and Zhuangzi are products of Chinese philosophy. There are quite some differences between these two. To use one of them in explaining another would be quite risky. There are some blind spots here and there. The explainer must be very sure and meticulous in what he or she is saying. Some Taoist words couldn't be used to explain some Indian minds – so we got to be very careful in this.

Q: That's why it is said in the Tao Te Ching:

*Ways which can be spoken of are not the eternal way.
Names which can be spoken are not eternal names.*
(道可道非常道。名可名非常名。)

A: You can use this to explain some aspects of Dharma, but be mindful that they are two different things.

Chinese Mahayana Buddhism had been quite successful in using these skilful means to propagate the *Buddhadharma*.

Organic Zen in Your Daily Life

Q: In any moment of our life, must we seize the opportunity and use it fully to transform ourselves?

A: For example, when you talk about Ethical conducts, Confucianism teaches us about “The Way of Living a meaningful life” - the four principles and eight virtues (*The four principles were propriety, righteousness, a sense of honor, and a sense of shame. The eight virtues were loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, love, faithfulness, justice, peace and harmony*); and this is quite similar to the Five precepts and Ten Virtues in Buddhism. But when it comes to the Bodhisattva’s way of Life, you hardly find any similar teachings in Confucianism. We can use some teachings and guidelines in Confucianism to explain some principles in Buddhism, they are supplementary teachings anyway; but when it comes to deeper and fundamental

parts, they are hardly the same. It is a good thing for the Chinese to understand the Dharma from the perspective of their own Chinese cultures, so I see it as a part of our advantages in introducing the proper teachings of the Buddha. Chinese Zen (Chan) lineage is a very good example of cultural flexibility and *Dharmic* liveliness.

Q: Is the Chinese Zen (Chan) an organic and lively way in expressing its own essence?

A: Definitely. Chinese Zen (Chan)'s uniqueness is its unique style that we call *Patriarch Zen* – which is a lively and dynamic way in expressing the Zen essence of the Buddha – the *Tathāgata Zen*. The *Tathāgata Zen* is the original spirit of Zen, and the *Patriarch Zen* is a dynamic and lively way in expressing that organic spirit.

Q: According to your own experience of Zen, which one is your style of Zen? It is Chinese Zen (Chan), Indian Zen or Insight Meditation (Vipassana) of Myanmar Buddhism?

A: I followed and practiced the Dharma step by step. I don't know how to jump from this level to that level.

At first I learned by heart the basic concepts and theories of Buddhism (e.g. cause and effect, Karma etc.); and then I progressed from there slowly and surely. Then I practiced and manifested my Dharma learning into my day-to-day living. I learned, practiced and entered into the essential spirit of Emptiness – the essence of *Tathāgata Zen*; and use all necessary methods or skilful means to express its liveliness and practical functions – which is the unique feature of *Patriarch Zen*. So this is my learning experience. I learn and transform things wherever I go, with whomever I met. When you know that there's more Truth to be discovered, you never stop learning and transforming yourself and others.

One tip for all of you – don't get stuck in the theories and concepts of Dharma. The level of your freedom depends on how you've practiced the Dharma in your daily live; NOT your intellectual knowledge and concepts. When you realized the Dharma more and more, you'll attain more and more freedom.

Q: As they said, "The Truth will set you free" – so will we attain more freedom if we know more?

A: Exactly so. And I don't even have to work hard on solving my problems, the right conditions and helps will be there. I am just there to witness all positive conditions come into play....everything is already PERFECT from the very beginning. How wonderful!

Q: So the purpose of your life is to propagate the Dharma wherever you go?

A: Not really. My life purpose is to learn about Dharma and put it into my practices. I never stop learning. I learn from everyone everything anytime. All conditions are my opportunities to become enlightened and insightful.

Between Kind and Evil Thoughts

Q: What are the Buddhist schools that teach us about this?

A: There are so many schools in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism like Zen and Pure Land. There are ten altogether:

1. Reality School or Kosa School or Abhidharma School.
2. Satysiddhi School or Cheng-se School.
3. Three Sastra School or San-lun School.
4. The Lotus School or T'ien-t'ai School
5. The Garland School or Hua-yen School or Avatamsaka School.
6. Meditative School or Ch'an School or Dhyana School.
7. Discipline School or Lu School or Vinaya School.
8. Esoteric School or Chen-yien School or Mantra School.
9. Dharmalaksana School or Ch'u-en School or Fa-siang School.
10. Pure-land School or Sukhavati School or Ching-t'u School.

All these schools have the same purpose – which is to discipline our body, speech and mind through various

methods of training. They all teach us to reduce our negative karma and to accumulate positive virtues. It boils down to the most important principle in Buddhadharma:

*Create no evil
Cultivate all good
Then, purify your mind
These are the teachings of Buddha*

So this is the basis of all our actions. But still, as a Dharma practitioner, we should aim at going beyond the dualistic notion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. For example, if you have Great Compassion that goes beyond all expectations and the need to control others, your light-hearted inspired actions will automatically help and liberate others. You do that spontaneously, without being judgmental or calculative about being a good person or not.

When you can go beyond ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘virtues’ and ‘non-virtues’ – you can then attain your True Nature of Mind. Anything that flows from this sacred space is wonderful, perfect and self-liberating!

The sixth patriarch once said,

*“Not thinking of good, not thinking of evil, what is
your original face?”*

Contemplate and meditate on this *koan* and you'll understand what I meant!

Q: Shifu, you talked about going beyond concepts and dualistic notions, but can we also use various linguistic skills to express this inconceivable state of non-duality?

A: To attain it – you need to sit down and meditate! Sitting meditation is a must here. But in order for us to have a glimpse of that state, we could use words and language to point at it. Words and language are just a preliminary skilful means, so you must throw them away at the end as well!

Please remember the wisdom words of Laozi:

*In the pursuit of learning, knowledge is increased
daily.*

*In the pursuit of Tao, actions are reduced daily.
Fewer and fewer actions are taken to the point of
none.*

When nothing is done, nothing remains undone.

So when you reach the ultimate level of Dharma, you've transcended all conceptual thoughts and manmade efforts. I remember when I first came out from my retreat, I could barely spoke a word for more than half an hour...

Q: Oh I remember that! It's a horrible experience to do interviews with you at that time! We ordinary beings used to judge one and another by their linguistic skills and oratory ability.

But Shifu, you are very clear and precise when you talk about Dharma now! May I know why?

A: Because when you know how to transcend words and language, you can then use them wisely and skillfully!

Q: Only through transcendence could we attain the full functions of it? When Buddha picked up a flower, only Mahākāśyapa smiled and understood – does Shifu yearn for that kind of state?

A: I want to enjoy it – NOT yearning for it!

Q: Was Mahākāśyapa a person who had cut-off all means of labels or words?

A: I don't think so. Mahākāśyapa is now in deep Samadhi – he is still meditating. As long as he is in a deep state of meditation, he won't be passing away. He is in a thoughtless state of deep meditation. For a great meditator, one thought of his is equivalent to 10,000 human years – and he entered into this state of deep Samadhi for about only three thousand years ago.

Mahākāśyapa's entire body was enshrined underneath the mountain Kukkutapada where it is said to remain until the appearance of Maitreya – the future Buddha.

Q: Can you tell us more about meditation?

A: Well, meditation is one of the important practices of the Eight Noble Path:

1. Right View;
2. Right Resolve;
3. Right Speech;
4. Right Conduct;
5. Right Livelihood;
6. Right Effort;

7. Right Mindfulness;

8. Right ***Samadhi*** (Meditation).

Right View enables you to see reality as it is; Right Resolve is a correct way of contemplating about impermanence, suffering, non-Self as well as the Ultimate Reality of formlessness; while the Right Samadhi is a practice that you engage in order to transcend all grasping of forms and labels – which is the attainment of your mind in a state of non-distraction – the unmoving state of perfect stability. But what is the thing that is unmoving here? In reality, the unmoving state is found in the movements; and in all movements, there's something that is always unmoved and unhindered.

Q: So how do we apply this into our meditation practice?

A: What I've said here are pith instructions of meditation. You just need a few instructions to guide you. I spoke to you only some useful ones, in Zen, we don't speak useless words. We go straight to the point. Every word is just nice and is meticulously designed to help your Dharma practice.

Q: Shifu, Taiwanese seems to be quite receptive towards Zen and Zen teachings, why is it so? Is it because we are living a very hectic and busy life?

A: I think Taiwanese are generally quite smart people. You are right to say that we are living a very hectic and busy life. In fact, busyness and moodiness are the obstacles of Zen practices. In Ling Jiou Mountain, we had been organizing countless Zen retreats (for 7, 21 or even 49 days), but only very small group of people could understand the essence of Zen; and some of them may lose their glimpses of the truth. There's no other way than hard and serious practice. You got to spend more time and efforts in practicing Zen. You need to get yourself familiarized with the new energy of Zen.

Q: What are the reasons that they lost their understanding of Zen?

A: Probably they didn't spend enough time in meditating. We are always caught up with our career and many other mundane activities.

Q: So in your view, Taiwanese has the need to practice Zen, but they don't necessary have the advantage to do

so?

A: There are indeed some advantages for Taiwanese as well. The problem is that there are far too many distractions and misinformation out there. So Taiwanese must know how to pick and choose. You have to be very smart and penetrative, and you got to have some positive karmic connection to learn authentic Zen. If you could equip yourself with some basic knowledge of modern science, anatomic view and common sense, then there's a high probability that you could approach Zen in an easier and more holistic way.

Q: What's the connection between our mental capacity and Zen practice?

A: Oh it has a deep connection. Zen is not a rigid model or structure. You have to have a very sharp mental capacity in order to practice Zen. All your discursive thoughts must be tamed and purified. You must be flexible and yet fully focus at all times. You must train your mind to be penetrative and 'radioactive' at the same time. I called it a *'mental practice of being open to all but attach to none'*.

- Q: What do you mean when you say ‘radioactive’ way of thinking?
- A: You must learn how to relate and connect – with the right objects, of course!
- Q: Can we enter into the essence of Zen by reading some *koans*?
- A: Of course you can. Zen has no doors and yet all doors can be used to enter into its essence. But you might go haywire, or being connected to some wrong understandings. You may waste all your whole efforts and time and still couldn’t find a proper way to practice Zen.
- Q: For us as Taiwanese, what kind of Dharma practice is most suitable?
- A: We as Chinese are often connected to Pureland and some esoteric practices of Tantric Buddhism. Everyone seems to practice in accordance to the proper guidelines, but the foundation of Dharma is not yet firmly established. In order to practice Tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism, you must begin with some Foundation practices (as your base), and then enter

into the practices of Anuyoga. If you don't have time to train your inner *qi* (energy), then your physical body would be very weak for you to attain some positive effects of *Energy(prana)*, *Channels (nadi)* and *Droplet (bindu)*. So before you enter into the practice of Anuyoga, it is best if you could achieve some mastery in these areas. Anuyoga teaches us about our mind's essence, it is a very difficult practice and not many gurus are willing to teach this. Fortunately or unfortunately, there are not so many students who are interested in recognizing their mind's true nature as well. So it is always a big gap here.

Q: So should we follow the footsteps of the great Milarepa and do some harsh training?

A: Milarepa was a great Mahasiddha, who is incomparable and unsurpassable! He had to go through tremendous sufferings in order to purify heavy negative karma that he had created previously. He had strong hatred and pride, and his negative karma had been his greatest obstacles of practicing the Dharma. He was ordered by his guru the great Marpa to build some houses and to destroy them, again and again. He

received repeated beatings from Marpa and he had serious sores in his body. At the end, when his bad karma was exhausted and his mind widely opened, Marpa passed him the greatest teachings of Mahamudra. Milarepa sat in meditation for eleven months uninterruptedly and he attained enlightenment in just one life time!

Q: So Milarepa was like Maha Kashyapa, who is now meditating in that specific mountain?

A: No, he is not meditating at this moment; he dissolved his whole being into the essence of Dharmakaya – the Truth body. He had installed his whole enlightenment into the *cosmic disk* of the entire Dharma realm!

Exist or not exist – Zen is just like THIS!

Q: Someone told me that Zen is just like existentialism, which cares and talks about the existence of humankind – is that true?

A: Zen is NOT existentialism – Zen is neither empty nor

full. It is neither existence nor non-existence.

Q: Does Zen exist within time or beyond time?

A: Zen doesn't exist in any domain. You could say that Zen manifests its essence within a realm between existence and non-existence.

Q: So we shouldn't use existentialism to explain Zen? As we understand, existentialism is a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his/her own development through acts of the will.

A: As I mentioned, Zen appears between existence and non-existence. When you say Zen exists, you couldn't find its substance. It has nothing whatsoever to be found – not even language and words. So how are you going to prove its existence? Zen is not a physical entity, it is simply our spiritual essence that cannot be proven by science. Zen is Emptiness itself, and Emptiness cannot be proven by any mundane devices.

Q: So Zen is non-existent?

A: Zen is not non-existent as well. Between existence

and non-existence is Zen.

Q: Nowadays some people used Marxism to describe Zen as well...since Marxism talks about liberation of humankind – is that correct?

A: It is a very superficial approach.

Q: Does it talk only about the phenomena, rejects all forms of dissimulation?

A: When you talk about existence itself, you tend to look at it at a superficial level. Yes, communism encourages public ownership and rejects all forms of dissimulation.

Q: How about the liberation of our body, mind and spirit?

A: Communism talks about ‘total liberation’, all ownerships belong to the public, and there’s no individual right whatsoever. When you say ‘body, mind and spirit’ – it is still a concept. It is a relative and dualistic idea of something else. But Zen talks about emptiness – and because everything is empty by nature, then you can let go of all your hang-ups and negative emotions (affliction). This is a ‘Great Total Liberation’ – unlike the word ‘liberation’ used in

communism.

Q: If we practice and actualize the essence of Zen in a more humanistic and mundane level, can we say that it is almost the same as communism?

A: Not exactly. Communism still talks about existentialism. Zen cares only about real liberation – which is beyond existence and non-existence. I am NOT playing with words here, I am talking practically about the true meaning and the essence of Zen. If you can practice and actualize Zen's essence in this world, then World Peace will be the direct result!

Q: Should we use the teachings of Zen as principles of good governance?

A: You'll attain great love, great compassion and egolessness if you actualize Zen in your life. When you attain 'no I', then there's no 'you vs. me' – everything and everyone is equal and we are all ONE. So the world automatically becomes very peaceful and harmonious. So when you practice Zen, not only you could change your life, but you could also transform the whole world around you. Your relationships with others and all things will be improved. You and the world become

ONE – so there's no enemy or enmity whatsoever.

Q: So there's no need to purchase any advanced weapons or missiles for self-defense? Then what's so-called 'the policy of Zen'?

A: 'The policy of Zen' is like Lao Tzu's way of living – it is the art of '*good governance without interferences*' – we called it '*wu-wei*' (無為而治) in mandarin.

Q: Does it mean the governance of a small country with very less population?

A: Not necessary so. The practice of Zen is very lively, flexible and multi-dimensional. It is a co-existent world of peace and interdependence; it is always creative, dynamic and self-regulating. Everything and everyone plays an important role for the betterment of all. This peaceful co-existence and multidimensional display of playfulness is always beautiful and charming. Such is the ideal world of Modern Zen.

Q: How about the function of law and order?

A: This is also a dualistic concept, a mundane idealization of what should be done and what shouldn't. The whole purpose of law and order is to ensure justice - a

situation in which the laws of a country are being obeyed, especially when the police or army are used to make certain of this. Its purpose is to protect the weak and minority from being harmed or mistreated by negative forces such as theft, violence, and disturbance of peace.

Q: Does Zen say anything about this?

A: Zen talks about selflessness (or egoless-ness), the emptiness of a 'self'.

Q: Will people then misunderstand that Zen is about doing what you want without considering about the law and order?

A: In Zen we believe in and abide by only one law – the Universal Law of Cause and Effect. We don't need any law other than this. Even mundane laws and orders are also created by our mind and consciousness - am I right? So we have to go back to the source/root of everything – which is our mind.

Q: So if we could apply Zen into politics, can we use it to help as many people as possible?

A: Exactly. Many Zen masters became 'national teachers'

for many emperors and leaders.

Q: Any Zen master who became a President of a country?

A: No. A Zen teacher is still a Zen master. His or her role is to guide, educate and heal the society. A Zen Master is very suitable as a consultant. There are many such stories in ancient China from which there were many interactions between renowned Zen Masters and Chinese emperors.

Between Idealism and Materialism

Q: From the perspective of Zen, how do you view Idealism and Materialism?

A: There's no soul in Materialism, and there's no external world in Idealism.

Q: Many of us think that since Zen talks about mind, it must be the same as Idealism?

A: What did I just say?

Q: You said "There's no soul in Materialism, and there's

no external world in Idealism”.

A: That's it. Nothing more, nothing less. Zen is neither Idealism nor Materialism. Materialism talks about material stuffs and according to this view, spirit or consciousness could not exist without the basis of a physical entity. When you die, there's no continuation of anything. You become totally destroyed and vanished. They care about this life, and there's no afterlife or past lives. This is nihilistic view according to Buddhism.

And Idealism is exactly the opposite of Materialism. Nothing exists out there besides the creation and projections of our own mind. This is almost the same as the view of Atman and Brahmanism in Hinduism, where everything is created by His own will – everything is mind and the ultimate mind is nothing other than God Himself. We generally categorized them as the view of Externalism.

Q: I am glad that Shifu can clarify this – this is an important subject that many people got confused about.

A: Thank you for asking as well. We call Zen as a

‘practice lineage of the Mind’, so I can see where this confusion comes from. But Zen is more than that, Zen goes beyond any mundane label. When you call it ‘mind’, then it is NOT Zen anymore...

Q: So Zen is NOT mind?

A: It depends on what is your definition of mind? If you think mind is our brain or our heart (flesh-lump) – then it has a beginning and it will end one day.

Q: Since we couldn’t find a solid entity that we could call it ‘mind’, so there’s no mind in Zen?

A: Zen is still a ‘practice lineage of the Mind’ – but this mind is not the ordinary mind that we were talking about.

Q: This is very philosophical!

A: Nothing philosophical. It is just the reality of life.

Q: So when we say “everything is created by mind alone”- is this mind a special and unique ‘mind’?

A: When we say “all things are created by mind alone” – we are referring to outer phenomena such as cause and effect, the external worlds, our egos etc – these things

of course all merely our mental creations or projections. But Zen says there's no 'I' – there's no subject, hence there's no objects to be created or projected. There's no creation whatsoever. There's no duality or dualistic concepts in Zen. Just like THIS is ZEN.

Q: But how do we explain this verse – “Zen is mind and Mind is Zen”?

A: If you could go beyond all forms and labels – that's your True Mind. Otherwise it's NOT.

Q: So In Zen, we are taught to look for this True Mind that goes beyond all concepts, labels and forms!

A: Exactly so!

Q: There's a common saying in Zen: “*One flower opens with five petals, and the fruit naturally ripens*”(一花開五葉, 結果自然成)- which is traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, are said to foretell the branching off of the five Zen schools that later appeared in China. These schools are the Linji (臨濟), Caodong(曹洞), Fayan(法眼), Yunmen(雲門) and Guiyang(沚仰) (which derived their names from their

founders) – so in this new age of technology and electronic advancement, do you think the Zen lineage will again bloom and flourish like it was in ancient China?

A: There's only ONE mind. Not two, not three. Not many.

Q: So there won't be another 'five petals' from the 'one flower'?

A: These five schools (five petals) are merely different skilful means to help others. The methods are different but the main goal is the same. For example, if you use different pipes to channel the water – the pipes are different since they are made by different materials such as plastic, aluminum etc., but their goal is the same, which is to channel the water. Similarly, these five schools had their different methods in awakening our mind, but the main goal is still the same – which is to help us in finding our True Mind. They are merely five very distinctive and unique methods in guiding others – do you get it?

Q: Distinctive and unique methods? There were many Zen schools at that time, but only these five were maintained because of their uniqueness and that's why

they outdo others?

A: Yes. Their methods are more systematic, organized and hence more powerful.

Q: So whatever Zen schools out there, whether it is Linji, Caodong or others, are they merely different in their ways in educating and guiding us?

A: Yes. They are reformed methods. They survived and outdone others because of their creativity and innovations. They use new approaches in teaching and helping others.

Q: More about these five schools. They are different merely in their way of teaching, so shall we have some new Zen methods in near future?

A: Nowadays we need to simplify things. Zen is very simple. That's the best for now!

Q: Can we make it simpler? Zen teachings and knowledge can be easily found in the internet nowadays.

A: Yeah, but authentic experience can't be bought and found in that way.

Q: So most important thing is to experience Zen directly

– am I right to say so? So must we follow you and learn from you to do sitting meditation?

A: As a teacher, my role is to pass down to you the lineage of authentic Zen experiences. If you want mundane knowledge, you can read more books or search it from the internet.

Q: Do we need to go back to the basic – just like the moment when the Buddha transmitted the Dharma to Maha Kashyapa and Maha Kashyapa smiled?

A: This *koan* is NOT the basic – that's the highest and most profound realization!!!

Q: So after its transmission in this world for more than 3000 years, we need to remind ourselves to aim for the highest peak of Zen experiences, and we should remind ourselves to follow the highest standard of Zen practices in order to do so?

A: Yes – the highest peak of Zen experiences, the highest standard of Zen practices – we need to aim for that.

Q: Since then onwards, the standard of Zen is dropping and dropping....that's why we need to use words and language to explain Zen?

A: Everyone has his/her own unique Zen realization due to his/her habitual tendencies, so we spread the essence of Zen according to your own levels of realization and understanding.

Q: According to Shifu's view, the koan of Maha Kashyapa was the highest standard of Zen realization, but when Zen was transmitted to China, it was influenced by philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi, but has it changed its way of teaching ever since?

A: The essence and education of Zen always go beyond all mundane forms and labels, including our different way of communicating e.g. our words and languages. But the principle remains always the same, and our main focus now should be – how can we uphold the highest standard of Zen practice and Zen experiences – which is the example of Maha Kashyapa? That's the ultimate question we need to ask ourselves. That's the ultimate *koan* that we need to practice hard and practice smart!

Q: The ultimate Zen approach which is beyond all words and languages – you mean like the *koan* practice of “Who am I?” - contemplating NOT the words, but

direct pointing to our own minds?

A: Yes. This is the most productive method in approaching Zen. No need to jot down or write anything. No words. No records. If you still couldn't understand – then use the Four Steps that I've mentioned before. Sometimes, gradual practice is also important before you could gain some sudden awakening.

Q: So if we couldn't reach the highest level of Zen understanding, we are encouraged to use the Four Steps described in 'Peaceful Zen'?

A: Exactly. But if you still couldn't grasp it (the four steps), then you should study the Four Stages (of Dharma Practices). As I mentioned, the Four Stages are the Agama, Prajna, Dharma-pundarika and the Avatamsaka. You'll understand Zen when you study these Four Stages step by step.

10th Dialogue

For a Future to be Possible - A Vision of Global Dharma Family –

Five Hundred Years after a major Religious Reformation

Q: This year marks the 500 Anniversary of Religious Reformation led by the great Martin Luther. What is your view regarding the future of all major religions?

What will happen to Buddhadharma after 50, 100 or even 500 years later?

A: There's no real substance that you could find in mundane knowledge. Similarly,

You couldn't find enlightenment in your Dharma knowledge as well. Philosophical Buddhism or intellectual Dharma won't help. In fact, I see some dangers in merely knowing or understanding the Dharma in an academic way – which is always dry, lifeless and have no sense of direction.

Q: Will it become worst when we are approaching to a new society that will only become more and more commercialized and materialized? Modern people tend to believe more in science, productivity, consumerism, mundane knowledge and commercial values...

A: In order to transcend all these, you need to have some Right Views. Without Right Views, you couldn't engage in dynamic and dedicated practices of the Dharma. Without Right Views, I couldn't have made the MWR a real success.

About A.I – Artificial Intelligence

Q: Everyone is talking about A.I (artificial intelligence) now....and according to a new study, in less than 50 years, artificial intelligence will be able to beat humans at all of their own tasks, and robotic machines could even have loving relationship with human being!

A: Computer software has no personal will or intention whatsoever...

Q: But according to some researches, they can achieve this scary feats in just 50 years!

A: This is all designed or created by human intention. 'Personal will' and autonomy cannot and will not be created by entities other than human beings. It cannot be designed or orchestrated by others.

Q: When big data reaches a certain level, it is said that there will be "spontaneous change". There will be genetic mutations in the human bodies, and 'personal will' and autonomy will then emerge spontaneously - what do you think?

A: I don't think so. There are and there will be many types of beings that exist on this earth and within the Universe. There are many sentient beings that stay in other realms within this world. Maybe there are some 'new beings' created by bio-science in some other worlds? Who knows? But according to Buddhist cosmology, human beings didn't come from 'Big-Bang' or evolution; we were 'transferred' here (by the power of our previous karma) from another higher realm.

Q: So Buddhists are against the theory of Evolution? I know there is 'Ancient Aliens' theory out there: the pyramids, Machu Picchu, stone hedge etc etc...

A: We don't have to against or pro anything. Facts or truth can be proven by latest scientific discoveries. According to the Buddha, there are millions of unknown universes out there, and historical texts, archaeology, and legends contain evidence of past human-extraterrestrial contacts as well. What more do we need to prove this? The issue now is, when you have contact with these extraterrestrial beings, what would you do? Can we handle this calmly and wisely?

The Future of Science and Buddhism

Q: Let's talk about the future now. Can we integrate modern science and Buddhism in the future? How could we do so? Grand Master Taixu (太虛) was instrumental in reforming Chinese Buddhism, and many scientists nowadays had agreed that there are great deals of Buddhist teachings that are similar to the latest scientific discoveries...

A: Buddhadharma is changeless reality of life. What is changing is human mind and its conditioning nature. It's your human thinking that is always changing.

Q: So how do we approach modern science according to Buddhism? How should we use modern science to verify the truth-ness of the Dharma?

A: We study science because we want to know more about the Dharma, we understand science in order to spread the Dharma in a more skilful and approachable way. Modern science is multi-dimensional, and there are tremendous amount of new data and knowledge

coming in everyday within every area of modern science. Take Quantum Science as an example, it is so technically refine and subtle that until the end, it reaches a point where we could take a peek or have some glimpses on the reality of *Shunyata* (emptiness). So we can definitely approach the mystical realms of spirituality through the great gateway of modern science. I have no doubts about this!

Q: The purpose of science is to have endless discoveries, but can we reach to the point where the ultimate state of *Shunyata* (emptiness) or Nirvana (perfect peace) is found?

A: From discoveries to the reality as-it-is, from existence to beyond existence – it's like playing Taichi, a magical display between stillness and movements, the Yin and the Yang...

Q: Shifu, are you also interested in modern science?

A: You can't say that I am interested in this or that. We need a simple and understandable way to lead our modern life. That's it.

Q: Simple and understandable? So simplification is the new duty of modern science – is that what you meant?

A: Science is organized, systematic, and dialectical. As a Dharma practitioner, we can use modern science to arrive at the truth. If the nature of Dharma is impermanence or changeable, then you have no way to learn or attain it. Since the Dharma does not change, by abiding on this changeless nature of reality, you can follow and understand all the changes and magical displays within the evolution of modern science.

Q: Shifu talks about an important point here. So how do you view the future, say 50 years away from now?

A: There are countless thoughts in every sentient being's mind and there are countless beings within this Universe. When you look at the whole picture, collectively speaking, we are a mass gathering of an Integral Reality. We are ONE and yet we are so different from one another. Oneness verses diversity. We are different and yet inter-connected. We are indeed a common entity of *Multidimensional Coexistence and Integral Interdependence*.

Q: So can we attain the perfect penetrative and

interconnected state (Perfect Intermelding, 圓融) mentioned in the Avatamsaka Sutra after fifty years later?

A: Judging from what's happening now, I think we could achieve that. In this fast moving age of information, if we can connect to each other intimately and unconditionally, we can immediately reap tremendous benefits from this ultimate connection. There's a possibility that we could attain the state of "All is One and One is All". But for now, unfortunately, we know many things about all things, and we didn't pay enough attention to the 'Oneness' of all things. That is our problem now. The attainment of 'Oneness' is the greatest difference between the Buddhadharma and modern science. It is also the crucial point that decides our direction in practicing or actualizing the Dharma.

Q: What's your view about other life forms in the Universe?

A: We are living in a very interesting world. It is a world of "many elements, one system" – a Uni-verse and a multiverse at the same time! We are One and yet in

this Oneness, many dimensions of manifestations are allowed; we are multi-dimensional, but we are ONE at the same time.

The multidimensionality of the Universe is expressed through the infallible universal law of Karma, and Karma (actions) is created and projected by our consciousness or mind. Thus various phenomena are created and formed, which are all seemingly solid and real, but they have no solid identity or substance whatsoever – they all appear and yet empty at the same time. All these phenomena are intrinsically interconnected, and due to their impermanent nature, they are changing from moment to moment, unceasingly and spontaneously. This is the law of Impermanence.

Q: Our pursuit towards the reality of the Universe – should it be endless and unlimited as well?

A: Oh, it depends on what basis you are doing such research. It depends on your reference points.

Q: For now, the best human being could do is to send spacecraft or use some scientific devices such as binoculars to observe and investigate....but the

problem is, the stars that we are watching now could have been ‘dead’ or don’t exist anymore! This is such a difficult task!

A: This kind of scientific investigation is solely based on our past experiences and limited knowledge – this is merely an accumulation of knowledge and it’s NOT supreme Wisdom. I don’t think we could discover anything within these fifty years.

Q: Can we communicate with some extraterrestrial beings within the next fifty years?

A: What kind of communication that you would like to have? From the Buddhist sutras, we’ve learned that the nature of the entire cosmos is nothing than the four processes of *formation, existing, decay, and disappearance*. Of course, there’s nothing wrong if we could use various scientific devices and mechanisms to explore the outer space; but in order to have a holistic understanding about the Universe, we need to supplement the advancement of science with some profound views – the science of ‘Inner Space’ - provided by the Buddhadharma. I believe that only the Buddhadharma could guide us to the source of

everything, included the nature of this physical cosmos.

Q: In physics, '*redshift*' happens when light or other electromagnetic radiation from an object is increased in wavelength, or shifted to the red end of the spectrum. When a star is dead or no more exist, say after a few million light years later, you could still sense or capture its flair images vividly. Does any Buddhist Sutra talk about this phenomenon?

A: Every location in the Universe is influenced by the imprints of our memories – the whole cosmos is created and formed by our collective consciousness or memories. All physical entities are actually our memory bodies.

Q: You mean the whole Universe is created by human consciousness/memories, which is our Karmic Memory (our Inner RAM (Random Access Memory) of Being)?

A: No, not only human beings. There are countless forms of sentient beings that exist within this cosmos!

This is a very important issue. We have our own

individual consciousness/memory body, and we also have Collective Consciousness/Collective Memory Body that we share with all other sentient beings. And there's Limitless Super Consciousness/the Supreme Memory Body as well. You must have a good understanding of all these concepts if you want to engage in serious Dharma practices.

Q: This is such an important view! A renowned philosopher once said, *'There are things known and there are things unknown and in between are the doors of perception'* – we are so used to our old memory body, our old perception; and we use it to project and create our outer universe...

A: Human being has the capability to unlock the mystery of life and the Universe. We hold the Key to all treasures and memories in this cosmos. Unlike plants and animals, human being has tremendous potential to access to ALL knowledge and wisdom of the entire Universe. Once we transcend the limitation and boundaries of mundane knowledge, we have the ability to become fully enlightened, and we can attain Omniscience if we practice the Dharma!

We Can All Attain Omniscience

Q: This lead me to another very important question – is it true that only human being could achieve Perfect and Pure Enlightenment but NOT other life forms? Or is this simply a self-proclaimed egoistic statement?

A: To become fully enlightened is truly our hidden potential as a human being. This is our advantage of being endowed with a precious human birth, which is NOT the case for other kinds of sentient beings. These other beings are bounded or limited by their collective Karma, their minds are clouded and they don't have enough merits to fully awaken their Buddha nature. The door of Omniscient Wisdom is temporary shut-down due to their negative karma and lack of merits.

Q: In Christianity, they talk about “Incarnation”– but some said our physical body is not a ‘non-local’ entity, hence this physical form will not become the ultimate embodiment of Truth, Universe or Godliness...

A: We attain Omniscience by using and utilizing the

energy of our physical forms – but physical entities that don't belong to '*non-local*' domain couldn't become one with the Ultimate Truth. The physical forms are merely the vessels used to express the Truth, and they are not the Truth themselves.

When we are trapped within our own limited perceptions, we cannot attain the Omniscient Mind. But when you practice and manifest the Dharma, Perfect Enlightenment becomes an absolute possibility – NOT merely some rare probability.

Q: Is this the function of Zen?

A: This, indeed, is the Goal of our Zen practice.

Q: Our Spirituality – is it ONE or many?

A: For some, the Matter is known but the Mind (and its empty essence) is unknown; for others, the Mind (and its emptiness) is known but NOT the Matter. In Reality, the Matter and Mind are the same. They are non-dual unity that manifest in different forms. In short, Unity is Diversity and Diversity is Unity. All in One, One in All.

Q: This is such a precious teaching!

A: Now I ask you: sentient beings and spirituality – are they the same or different?

Q: (Long Silence...)

A: You've got it. Wonderful!

Science of Mind and Consciousness

Q: I want to ask Shifu about Mind's Science. You said that our memory body is likened to our genes; and you also talked about IC (Integrated Circuit), A.I (Artificial Intelligence) etc., do you think that after fifty years later, we could find an entity by the name of "Memory Genes"?

A: Don't we already have what we called the twenty three pairs of chromosome? These chromosomes will pair and combine with each other – as you know, the possibilities of their combinations are limitless and ceaseless. But what is behind all these wonderful phenomena? Who is orchestrating all this? It is meticulously designed and demonstrated by your own

mind. Find this True Mind, and you'll know the Ultimate Source of everything in the Universe.

Q: So these genes can be passed down and continued as a sustainable eco-system?

A: You are right.

Q: When the physical body dies, the spirit returns and dissolve into the empty space – so what is there to be passed down or continued?

A: Even the emptiness itself is also a magical display of the memory body. What is passed down or continued is NOT a solid and unchangeable entity but a flow of ever-changing appearances and experiences...

Q: What will be the future of the Science of Mind and Consciousness? You mentioned before that there's no personal will in the A.I, there's no creativity, imagination and self-sustainability in A.I – which are all vital signs of a living being. Do you mean that the A.I couldn't reproduce or re-create itself?

A: Machineries and their soft-ware are instrumental in creating repeated movements and monotonous repetitions, their perceptions and experiences are

designed in such way.

Q: Let's assume that an A.I robot is self-aware of its own existence; can it practice Zen one day?

A: Machines and robots will never have self-awareness. Self-awareness comes from an organic, primitive and organic living organism – machines and robots are dead things that are created by human beings.

Q: So machines and robots couldn't be intelligent enough to become aware about themselves?

A: That's quite impossible. If they are self-aware, then they must be living beings who are organically alive; but as we all know, machines and robots are produced, created and designed by living beings e.g. the human race, and yet, these machines and robots are NOT conscious living beings. They can be duplicated (by human) but they can't reproduce themselves.

Q: In terms of the Science of Mind, how could we equip ourselves with this knowledge so that we could understand ourselves wiser and better? How far can we go from here?

A: We need to look within, and find back our true source

of well-being and happiness. We need to bring our monkey mind HOME.

Q: As Erwin Schrödinger said, “What we observe as material bodies and forces are nothing but shapes and variations in the structure of space” – can Shifu please explain this ability of self-reflection in terms of Quantum physics, and its relations with our Zen practice?

A: We can use the principles of Quantum Physics to reflect upon ourselves. We can use this view and make a Quantum Leap, so that we could manifest our innermost Buddha nature and alter your personal and collective reality.

Yes, let's utilize this Quantum Mechanics to return to our Inner Oceanic Source of Wisdom, Power and Compassion.

Q: So besides the Science of Mind and Consciousness, we still need to be meditative and contemplative in order to explore and know our mind?

A: If you still don't know the nature of your mind, keep practicing the Dharma until you get it. When you

attain your mind's nature, your journey of searching and investigating will come to an end.

Q: This technique of training and investigating the Mind which is based on Mind's Science and Quantum Physics – will it bring much help to those who have mental problems?

A: It depends. If they can sit down, contemplate and look within, then this is helpful. If not, it will probably become another form of distraction and exhaustion. Not much healing effects will occur for those who couldn't look within and contemplate on their mind's nature.

So you have to come back to your awareness, look within, and come back to your Ultimate Source, your True Mind.

Q: How about having some psychic power e.g. Heavenly Eyes, the ability to see anything as we wish - the supernatural power of Clairvoyance? I read a book on scientific experiments on Clairvoyance. Does the usage of supernatural power such as Clairvoyance, Clairaudience, and Clairsentience etc. interfere with the universal law of cause and effect? Will we reach a

conclusion on these powers fifty years later?

A: What you described is NOT 'Heavenly Eyes' mentioned in Buddhism. We have Five Eyes in Buddhism: Physical Eyes, Heavenly (Divine) Eyes, Wisdom Eyes, Dharma Eyes and Buddha Eyes.

All these supernatural abilities can be developed through deep Samadhi or strong meditation power. But please also take note that these authentic supernatural powers are very clear, insightful and holistic, and it would NOT interfere the law of cause and effect as well. Those that intervene and changes the flow of things are simply some mundane psychic abilities and NOT Buddhist supernatural powers. Some of them are fake, and most of them are obscured and vague.

Q: So authentic supernatural powers don't intervene with the law of cause and effect?

A: Of course not. These supernatural powers are simply some natural functions of our Buddha nature; they are gentle and compassionate powers that influence the outcomes of certain events without imposing any commanding order or violent threats.

Q: As we know, supernatural abilities are NOT the totality of our consciousness but merely its functions and manifestations. Formal president of National Taiwan University (NTU), Dr. Lee Si-chen (李嗣涔) reportedly announced a breakthrough in his research on extrasensory perception (ESP) and some paranormal activities. As I heard, they are now doing some experiments on having direct contact and conversations with the *spirit world*...

A: Our interactions and conversations here are also quite *spiritual*, don't you think so?!?

Q: But these physicists and scientists are so committed in doing such metaphysical studies and experiments...

A: You and I are spiritual beings as well. Although we are human beings and some so-called spirits are from other realms, but we are *all spiritual beings having some physical experiences here*.

Q: What is the language of the spirits? Can they possess human bodies and talk to us directly?

A: Spirits communicate with us with various kinds of languages. Human languages are a part of their

communication channels as well.

Q: Shifu, do you have any direct experiences in manifesting some supernatural abilities via the power of Deep Samadhi/Meditation as you mentioned before?

A: I won't call it an experience though. If your mind is pure and clear, by the power of your luminous mind and innermost clarity, you can easily produce all kinds of supernatural psychic abilities. You can't produce any authentic power if your mind is heavily clouded, blurred or distracted.

Q: Only through profound clarity generated by deep meditation could we achieve the highest state of supernatural power i.e. the Omniscient Mind?

Q: What do you mean when you use the word "Omniscience"? You have to be patient in doing some hard practices before you could reach the state of Perfect Omniscience. If you follow the correct path of the Dharma accordingly, then you will gain some fundamental momentum in achieving that goal, if not, you are still being trapped within the endless circles of cyclic existence (*samsara*).

Q: When Grand Master Xu Yun (Empty Cloud, 虛雲老和尚) was building the Yunqi Shan Temple (a process quite similar with the establishment of Ling Jiue Mountain), he could carry a hundred catty of bricks every day, was this also the power of his deep meditation?

A: That's the power of Deep and Strong Concentration.

Q: Isn't that a manifestation of his psychic abilities as well?

A: Deep Concentration is also a kind of supernatural power.

Q: Is it about Mindfulness and Concentration?

A: Let's talk about the Eight Noble Paths here.

The first is **Right View** – a changeless and authentic view that perceives reality as it is; with this Right View, you can proceed to generate some good thoughts – which is **Right Thinking**. When you speak with Right Thoughts, your words become **Right Speech**; when you behave according to this Right way of Thinking, you create **Right Action**; from Right Action we develop an ethical way of living i.e. **Right Livelihood**. **Right**

Diligence happens when you have the joy and tireless efforts in cultivating virtues and eliminating negativities; from Right Diligence you could then produce **Right Meditation** and **Right Mindfulness**. When you are stable and calm in all aspects of your body, speech and mind; each and every thought become naturally pure, clear and insightful. You should use this Eight Noble Path as a trustable GPS in guiding your Dharma path towards the supreme goal of perfect enlightenment.

Q: So Master Xu Yun's power came from his own mental focus, which transcended all his physical limitations and weakness?

A: His mind is stabilized and it abided on where it should stay. He was so focus that he spontaneously transcended all mundane limitations and worldly phenomena.

Q: Will we fall back to our normal selves if we lose our focus?

A: That's right. So you must generate a strong focusing mind, and then maintain its consistency and stability. That's about it.

Q: Can we constantly stay in this supreme state of perfect Mindfulness?

A: That's quite possible.

Q: Will there be a state when we even forget that we need to nurture our mindfulness and say, "Ah! I've lost my mindfulness! Where's it now?"

A: No. A true Dharma practitioner won't utter these words.

Q: Some of my friends become very sick and depressed after they've tried to do some of the preliminary practices such as *Ngondro* (the Four Foundations) – maybe they don't have enough Mindfulness in their daily practice?

A: Simply because they are newbies in Dharma practices.

Q: Shifu! Can you keep yourself in a state of constant and stable Mindfulness?

A: *I don't know who is this guy that is talking to you. I don't even care!*

Q: Can we use our supernatural powers to change or alter our Karma?

A: If you could do that, then it's NOT supernatural at all.

Q: Many people try their best in using these supernatural powers to change their destiny, is it even possible?

A: Well, it depends. Are you ready to give up something as an exchange?

Q: You mean, just like what is stated in the book "Lian Fan's Four Lessons"?

A: You have to do a daring exchange – use the positive energy of your Dharma practice to overcome, purify or transform all your negativities and non-virtues. Change is very possible if you begin with your Dharma actions.

Q: Can we even change our negative Karma created in our previous lives?

A: You can change anything and everything if you find the correct method. The principle of changing one's destiny is to perform more and more virtuous deeds and Dharma practices. The more you manifest your positivity and goodness, the more you could change your past Karma.

Q: Do we have to do a record on every good thing we do?

A: That's not necessary. Just keep doing it, and your Karma will change. You must know how to use your mind's power to transform your Karma energy.

Zen is Ultimate Emptiness

Q: Can we foresee our future by doing Zen meditation?

A: In Zen, we attain the state of perfect nothingness, the Ultimate Emptiness of all phenomena. Everything is totally deconstructed and destroyed, without even a trace of anything at all. In Zen language, we call it *"destroying the corpse without leaving a trace"*.

Q: It's truly hard for us to imagine or experience this kind of Ultimate Emptiness. It seems like we can't see or experience anything...

A: Don't worry – not seeing or experiencing anything is also a form of seeing/experiencing.

Q: So am I already in this state of Ultimate Emptiness? When didn't I?

A: You're already there by being here and now. In fact,

there are no moments when you are NOT. Just keep your Ordinary Mind will do.

Q: How do we know if our ego pops out and take control of us again?

A: Nothing goes in and nothing pops out from us. Just like this is perfect. When your view is not there, you're not there. There's still separation between you and the Truth. Do you understand?

Q: I think I got some glimpses of it. When I enter into this sacred space of Ultimate Emptiness in my meditation, I can perceive the Truth correctly and perfectly; but I surely can't do this during my post-meditation time, am I right?

A: No. When you attain the right view, the view will penetrate all moments of your meditation – either it is before (pre-meditation), during (meditation) or after (post-meditation). The right view is pervasively penetrative and powerful. It transcends all limitations of time and space. The taste of Dharma is the same at the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

Q: Many corporate people like to organize seven days

Zazen retreat nowadays; do you think this is a healthy trend?

A: I'll teach them how to '*cool things down*' first – how to be peaceful and calm; how to stay away from all sorts of distractions, attachments, distortions and depressions. When things get cool down, then we'll get into some foundational '*Zen warmth-ups*'.

Q: Do we use our thinking mind during meditation?

A: Am I thinking while you are talking to me now?

Q: But, aren't we supposed to throw away all our thoughts when we meditate?

A: Well, it depends on what level of meditation that you are practicing.

Q: So thinking is allowed during the initial stage of meditation?

A: When you are a newbie in meditation, you must engage with your thinking mind. But when you are familiarized with the content and process of meditation, thinking or not-thinking makes no difference for you. You go beyond thinking and not-

thinking when you attain Ultimate Emptiness – and that's the real state of 'no thoughts'.

Q: So we are not supposed to reduce or add anything in our meditation?

A: No adding, no reduction. No creation, no destruction. Zen helps you to simply discover your True Nature, which is already there; and it is primordially empty and pure at the same time.

Q: This is truly the taste of Zen! I wish these corporate Zen practitioners could realize this!

A: This view will bring tremendous benefits to their current Zen practice.

Thinking about Our Future

Q: Shifu, in what direction human being is heading now? Our resources are getting lesser and lesser in the future, and two-third of our population will be facing critical issues such as water shortage, insufficient food supplies, wars, poverty, global warming, climate change, industrial pollutions etc., and our population is reaching the amount of 8 billion very soon! The

entire ecological system has been disturbed and challenged, many animal species and plants are facing serious threats of extinction and genetic mutation now – what should we do to cope with these serious and critical issues?

A: To heal and transform planet earth, we must first heal and transform our own mind. We must have a grateful attitude towards this Mother Earth, and in repaying her kindness and care, we must not give her anymore burdens and pollutions. If our foolishness grows in proportion with our population growth, the destructive power of humankind is bad enough to destroy this planet earth for many many times!

We need to learn to love our Mother Earth. There's a Declaration from the Inner Peace Movement that we co-founded:

“Peace is the common goal of all humanity,

Loving kindness is the manifestation of the Human spirit.

Thus

We vow to respect all faiths,

Value all cultures,

And love all living beings.

In accordance with this vision, the Inner Peace Movement was founded to promote the reduction of noise, carbon emissions, and food-consumption in an effort to protect the environment and also to purify ourselves in body, mind, and spirit.”

So Let us join together in a spirit of mutual support and harmonious coexistence in order to establish a global family of love and peace!

Q: Is the establishment of the University for Life and Peace your response to this calling?

A: Yes. We are promoting a global movement of loving and protecting our Mother Earth.

Q: What are the basic ideas behind this meaningful global movement?

A: Let's live a meaningful life of peace and simplicity. Live simply so that others can simply live. Don't overspend or overuse anything. Minimize or purify the current lifestyle of consumerism and materialism,

lead a holistic lifestyle of integrity and sustainability.

Q: Back to innocence – the *wu-wei* way of living a simple life, as the ancient Tao?

A: It's simply a lifestyle of simplicity and serenity. We must now actively engage in all methods of healing ourselves and the Mother Earth. Let her take some rest, heal her wounded-ness and dis-eases, let her regenerate her vitality and vigor. We can only become truly healthy and wealthy when the Mother Earth is healed holistically and completely. In short, let's lead a meaningful life of simplicity and sustainability, holistically and powerfully.

The Secret Code to Happiness and Well-being

Q: Are we going to be happier in future, say fifty years from now? Are we changing and progressing towards a right direction?

A: Things will remain pretty much the same if we don't change our mind. If we can reduce or even purify our

attachments, hatred and ignorance – we are heading towards a brighter future. But if we keep manifesting our negative emotions and afflictions through various scientific and technological advancement (as we are doing it now), I think we are moving backwards instead of progressively improving our quality of living. This is endlessly dangerous, and could lead us towards a very disastrous future.

Q: Why?

A: It's getting harder and harder for us to cope with 'intelligent crimes' nowadays. You need to have superior technology to cope with them, to identify them and catch them; and they can always improve themselves and upgrade their technology accordingly.

Q: What should we do now?

A: Go back to the Dharma concept I mentioned before. Everyone wants happiness and everyone want to get rid of sufferings – but what is the right way to do so? We need to perfect our virtues and eliminate our own negativities, firstly by cultivating Renunciation (Letting-go) and then by practicing the supreme mind of Enlightenment (the Bodhi Mind or *Bodhicitta*). The

simplest way to do it is to lead a holistic and simple life of contentment and loving kindness. You will become a very happy and productive person if you know how to love yourself, the Mother Earth and all her lovely inhabitants – all mother sentient beings.

Q: What is the difference between this holistic happiness compared to sensual pleasure pursued by hedonists? Are we encouraged to pursue something greater than ourselves, say collective happiness that benefits everyone in the society as a whole?

A: The pursuit of collective happiness has the element of greediness in it as well. I am promoting a Dharmic lifestyle of simplicity and contentment. As I said, live simply so that others could simply live. If you could practice this in your daily life, that for me, is the best way to benefit yourself and others. Every aspect of your life will be infused with the power of compassionate virtues and natural abundance. This is truly a positive vicious circle of transforming our environment and society.

Q: But how do we quantify or define our Happiness? Any Happiness Index to recommend?

A: You can't become happy if you have no love. To be happy, you must know how to love and be loved. To obtain real happiness and to liberate ourselves from all kinds of sufferings, we must first find out the ultimate source of our unhappiness and then eliminate this root cause. If you are confrontational and dualistic in your way of relating with others, and you bring in negative emotions such as desire, anger, jealousy, suspicion, ignorance, fear etc. into your relationships, how can you be happy? But if you love yourself, your fellow human beings, all sentient beings and the Mother Earth, you'll automatically emanate an aura or energy of great love and great compassion, which is the only true source of all your happiness and well-being. You would have loving and forgiving relationships with yourself, others and with the nature.

Q: Shifu, what's your view on human being's future?

A: I am promoting a global view and movement of Love and Peace – let's create a global family of virtues, kindness, services, giving and self-respect – a true global family of Love and Peaceful co-existence.

Our future is impermanent and uncertain, but we can begin to change ourselves, so that a better and brighter future is ensured. We do this with a pragmatic, practical and holistic vision – in a positive and healthy matter, in its own perfect divine timing, for the highest benefits of all. If we know how to give and forgive, we can even transform this *samsaric* world into the Pureland of Buddha Amitabha – the pureland of Ultimate Bliss, the Sukhavati.

Q: What would you like to say to your readers fifty years from now?

A: Learn how to heal and love yourself, so that the Mother Earth could do her self-healing process accordingly. Learn to heal and love your environment and all the people around you. Use your prayerful Dharma energy to transform yourself, your living space and the entire universe. And last but not least, please believe in yourself. Have faith and believe in your own luminous Buddha nature – and Shine like a brilliant star!

A Global Meditative

Movement of Peace and Tranquility

Q: All religions talk and promote peaceful co-existence, but there are so many religious conflicts all around the world, what's Shifu's views on this?

A: Genuine peace and harmonious co-existence begin with us – it has to be an inside-out approach. In this new era of CSR (corporate social responsibility), I have the conviction that *‘when the heart is at peace, the world is at peace’* and designated that as the core value of my spiritual career, taking ‘Life and Peace’ as our vision and mission.

I have been proactive in promoting spiritual education, universal values and building meditation centers around the world, so that we could handle these conflicts – whether religious or not – in a more mature and pragmatic way.

To end sufferings and conflicts on our beloved Mother Earth, ‘Self-Awareness’ and ‘Inner Awakening’ are two major concepts that I always recommend to all parties

involved. We can achieve these two ideals by simply cultivating inner peace and self-love, by using and practicing some meditation techniques. By practicing meditation, our meditative energy will spill-over to everyone and everything around us, thus influencing all phenomena in a very subtle and impactful way. We will then know how to be at peace with others, with nature, and with all sentient beings. Only a good heart is capable in harmonizing everything and emanating a positive and holistic energy that heals, loves, purifies and energizes all imbalances and conflicts. A global family of Love and Peace will then be a practical and achievable dream for you and me.

Q: You have been promoting the Meditation Movement of Peace and Tranquility for quite some time now; what's the reasons behind this? Is Peace/tranquility equal to the essence of Zen?

A: We must return to our inner source of peace, contentment and tranquility. We can do it by practicing Zen meditation. The only way to peace is to cultivate a peaceful and loving heart, infused with a clear conscience, mindful clarity and wise insights. We are connected to many leaders from all areas while we

began this movement. We received and continue to receive tremendous supports and encouragements from political leaders, social activists, business entrepreneurs as well as young future leaders.

Global Peace - Zen as the Ultimate Solution

Q: What's your suggestion for us to achieve world peace and harmonious co-existence?

A: To achieve love and heal our global family, I suggest a four steps formula:

1. **Practice Mindful listening** – listening to your inner voice, others' inner voice and your innermost calling; listen to the heartbeat of the earth, the Universe and most importantly, the Ultimate Sound of your True Nature of Mind.
2. **Bring in Dialogues and Conversations between all parties** - speak your inner voice with integrity, respect, love, tolerance, stillness and mindfulness. We can all do this and bring peace and love into our

inner and outer dialogues.

3. **Create Powerful Connections** – As mentioned in the Avatamsaka Sutra:

They [Buddhas] know all phenomena come from interdependent origination.

They know all world systems exhaustively. They know all the different phenomena in all worlds, interrelated in Indra's net.

The Indra's net is a vast net that encompasses the Universe. A special jewel is found at the intersection of every horizontal and vertical weave in the net, and each jewel reflects every other jewel in the net, holistically and meticulously. By looking into any one jewel, one sees them all. So every little event or entity could unveil the whole Universe because EVERYTHING is mutually interconnected; all are inter-meld into each other and this inter-beingness has no barriers or obstruction. In this universal Indra's net of multidimensionality and interconnectedness, we must communicate and interact with each other in order to create multiple meaningful network of change and transformation.

4. **Create Oneness and Meaningful Cooperation**—we are all ultimately equal and equally important in the Oneness of Life; but we must be open to our connectedness and strive hard to help one another for a better and brighter future for all.

There's a famous tale derived from the Avatamsaka Sutra:

There are two men being forced to sit down face to face at a table, facing each other, and they are tied up except for one arm. Each of them was given an over-long spoon; and they can't feed themselves simply because the spoon was too long. They are very hungry and there are plenty of foods on the table. So we have two totally different scenarios or options here:

Option One – if they can cooperate to feed each other, they can both be happy and satisfied; this defines 'cooperation' – the Paradise or Pureland;

Option Two – if they refuse to feed each other or only one party is willing to do so – both of them will end up suffered and there will be hatred and enmity in their minds. This is 'hell realm' in reality.

The wise and skilful one will choose the first option – which is the practical solution that brings happiness and satisfaction to all parties involved. In order to benefit each other, ‘Meaningful Cooperation’ is the only best solution, and we must choose well to act skillfully!

Let us be inspired by these important steps, may we enrich ourselves and others with the powerful messages of all wisdom traditions; and may we attain and become one with our Ultimate Source of peace, love and beauty!

Q: Can you suggest any ultimate solution for us to achieve global peace?

A: Aiming for a global platform to optimize promotions for the worldwide campaign of ‘Loving the Earth / Loving Peace’, as well as to share it with future world leaders and influencers more effectively, my next-step will be manifesting this Vision. We are co-creating a world-class institute of Life Education by the name of **‘University for Life and Peace’**.

I firmly believe that Global Peace and real harmony can only exist when there’s co-existence between countries, regions, races, and religions. We need to transcend all

dualistic labels and mundane distinctions of “*me versus you*”. I intend to promote this movement and spirit of interfaith dialogues all across the nations, spreading ideal across the academic spectrum and working hard to align this vision of ‘global peace’ with the business community and political leaders on different levels, and to nurture its momentum into shaping a impactful and powerful social movement.

All worldly phenomena are constantly in a flux of change. Sufferings, problems, conflicts etc., they are all impermanent and unsatisfactory. There’s no perfect mundane solution to this imperfect world, but through the cultivation of Zen and its powerful transformative energy, we can surely bring some positive impacts and basic goodness to this beloved Mother Earth. We can and we must return to our own innermost Source of Ultimate Purity and Clarity, which is our True Nature, Our Zen Mind or our Buddha Nature.

In the Vimalakīrti Sutra, the bodhisattvas give a variety of answers on the question what non-duality is. Manjusri (the Bodhisattva of great wisdom) is the last bodhisattva to answer, and says that “*By giving an explanation they have already fallen into dualism*”.

Vimalakirti, in his turn, answers with ‘silence’.

This so-called ‘thundering’ silence served as a forerunner of the approach of the Ch’an/Zen tradition, with its avoidance of positive statements on ‘ultimate reality’:

The Zen tradition is avowedly the Buddhism of Vimalakirti’s silence - a claim that is explicitly reinforced by the practice of silent meditation. So, to bring world peace and to achieve ultimate solution, *let’s keep our silent mind and start to meditate!*

However, there are a few qualities in getting the Zen’s essence:

1. Your True Nature is already there – it never reduces nor increases, it is already perfect and ready for you to explore and extract its goodness;
2. By being open to your Buddha nature, you become naturally relax and uncontrived – this is the gateway to your inner light of wisdom and compassion;
3. You can then bring out the quality and clarity of your Zen mind into every aspect of your life, be it eating, drinking, walking, talking or sleeping.

4. When you eat, just eat; when you talk, just talk; when you smile, just smile – keep your mindfulness clear, stable and vivid. Wherever and whenever you are – just BE.
5. To gain clarity and purity of your Zen mind, you need to nurture or practice Zen meditation constantly and consistently. Have faith in your ability to do so, as it was described in the “Faith in Mind” (a Zen poem attributed to the Third Chinese Chan (Zen) Patriarch, Jianzhi Sengcan 鑑智僧璨):

*The best way [the Great Way, the Tao] is not difficult;
Only if you don't pick and choose,
If you free your mind from likes and dislikes,
Your True Mind will reveal itself fully and without
disguise!*

Q: Thank you so much for your insightful teachings and advice! May your Dharma activities spread wide and far, now and forever more!

A: My gratitude to all of you. May everyone be well and happy, may we strive together as a Dharma global family of love and peace, and May the precious Mind of Enlightenment (Bodhi Mind) prevails!

A Path with Heart – about Dharma Master Hsin Tao

The Museum of World Religions is a testament to Ven. Hsin Tao's deep commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue and understanding between people of different faiths and to building a better world founded on universal love and peace. Born in a poor farming village in Myanmar's Shan State and orphaned at an early age, Ven. Hsin Tao knows only too well the suffering and misery caused by war and violence. Recruited as a child soldier by the Kuomintang guerilla army as it retreated into Burma from China, he landed in Taiwan when the army was forced to flee Burma. A chance encounter in Taiwan with the chanting of the name of the bodhisattva of compassion, Guanyin (Skt. Avalokiteshvara), marked a turning point in his life. Ven. Hsin Tao recalls: "I felt such a deep sense of connection that tears welled in my eyes. From then on, I vowed to be guided by Guanyin."

Convinced of the importance of the role of religion to effect genuine change in the world, Ven. Hsin Tao then worked fervently to establish the Museum of World

Religions. “This is my mission—to promote respect, tolerance, and love for peace among religious communities,” he says. “This unique museum, which opened in 2001, is more than a showcase of religious exhibits; it is a bridge linking different religions. We need to teach about religions and religious life in the world and provide instructive experiences about the variety of religious expressions as a basis for mutual understanding, peace, and love among the peoples of the world. We need to encourage people to explore the fundamental values that are common to, and at the root of, all religions. Only then can we work together to create greater understanding and peaceful interaction.”

“The museum serves as an invaluable platform for people of different faiths—for religious learning, interfaith dialogue, and co-operative efforts. For example, after the 9/11 [attack] on the Twin Towers, there was a lot of anti-Muslim sentiment and much of the mainstream media portrayed Islam as ‘evil.’ We engaged moderate Muslims in dialogue with other faiths to explain what Islam really teaches. Even now in the Middle East, debate rages on the issue of religion. Violence and aggression do not solve anything. We need

genuine dialogue to achieve some resolutions.”

In 2002, Ven. Hsin Tao established the Global Family for Love and Peace (GFLP), an international NGO founded on the philosophy of “Love the Earth, respect all life, awaken your spirit.”

“Through the GFLP, we promote environmental protection and the harmonious existence of all beings,” explains Ven. Hsin Tao. “Each living being is like a jewel. When these jewels are joined to form a net, they simultaneously illuminate and reflect each other, like Indra’s Net. So we have a global network of shared resources and mutual assistance not confined to Buddhists, but for all in need. When the 2004 tsunami happened, we set up an inter-religious fundraising committee comprising Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Daoists, and Muslims to help the victims of the disaster in Sri Lanka.”

Ven. Hsin Tao travels the world tirelessly advocating peace and non-violence through interfaith dialogue and combining religious practices with political and social activism. In 2009, he generously supported the Council for a Parliament of World Religions in the first

Conflict Resolution Program, which brought together peacekeeping teams from various regions of the world that have been affected by conflict to share models of cooperation and hope in the cultivation of peace and justice. “We can achieve this when different religions are working in the same direction and concentrating on peace work, and taking the initiative to encourage militants and politicians to give up biochemical weapons and nuclear weapons, which destroy the whole world and human beings,” he says.

But it is in his motherland of Myanmar that Ven. Hsin Tao’s heart truly lies, and for more than 20 years, he has been involved in various charity projects in the country. In 2006, in collaboration with UNICEF, he established Dayu Nursery in the Irrawaddy Delta region. After Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, the GFLP helped rebuild schools and orphanages and provided other forms of aid. In June this year, Ven. Hsin Tao took another step towards the realization of his long-held dream and deepest aspiration by building a monastic training center for 450 monks at Naung Mon in Shan State. “The people in this northern part of Myanmar have been subjected to a lot of suffering,” he notes. “The war has

caused much misery, and there are many orphans and abandoned children. This is a way to express my gratitude for what I have received, especially after being bestowed the title of ‘AggaMahaKammatthanancariya’ by the Burmese sangha [which recognizes the highest level of spiritual attainment in meditation]. Myanmar is endowed with a rich Buddhist culture. There is an urgent need to preserve and protect this heritage before we lose it to rapid economic development.”

He sees education as playing a critical role: “We need a new generation of sangha members who are multilingual, trained, knowledgeable, and capable of using modern technology to spread Buddhism. Mahar Kusalar Yarma Monastery at Naung Mon will serve as a shining example of learning in the Nalanda spirit to nurture monks and nuns of the finest caliber, scholastically and morally, and who are committed to protecting and propagating the Dharma in the modern age. In addition, it will be a focal point for all faiths to share their contemplative practices and grow together—an institution where people from different religious background can come together, exchange and explore ideas, and find common ground to work together for all

humanity.” Ultimately, as Ven. Hsin Tao emphasizes, “Real peace can only be attained when we all develop inner peace.”

(Extracted and edited from [www.
Globalbuddhistdoor.com](http://www.Globalbuddhistdoor.com))